

# Editorial

## Turning the Tide

New chapters in the lives of individuals and institutions are both exciting and alarming. Rutherford House is now twenty years old, and the work of David Searle has placed it firmly on the map and made it an increasingly valued resource to many as it has become involved in training as well as continuing and expanding its conferences and building up its library and residential facilities. We are all very grateful to David for his careful, imaginative and tireless commitment to *encouraging effective ministry*.

That task must be carried on, and, as the scene changes ever more rapidly, the House's ministry must both be faithful to its founding vision as well as open to new opportunities and challenges. The problems are obvious; the 'death of Christian Britain' is evident in thinly attended churches, the contempt of much of the media for Christian values, the abysmal ignorance of the Bible, the secularising of public life, the dearth of candidates for the ministry and the sense of gloom that often afflicts those most committed to the gospel.

The words and the imagery we use to describe our response to the situation are important. If we see the situation as simply 'holding the fort', we are

settling for managing decline and more of the same. It is important to think instead of 'turning the tide'. We cannot turn the tide, only the Holy Spirit can, but we can cultivate a sense of expectancy. We need to pray for miracles while we plan for possibilities.

### Our Roots

Rutherford House was founded to be a resource to the evangelical community and to promote effective preaching, teaching and scholarly engagement with Scripture. While open to all confessions and traditions, its heartland and emphases are firmly evangelical. I want to reaffirm the commitment to the centrality of Biblical exposition, preaching and teaching. The movement that God used William Still to begin nearly sixty years ago gave Scripture and its teaching back to church. We do not need to re-invent the wheel. Biblical preaching is non-negotiable; if there is a widespread abandonment of that, there is no future for the church.

Nevertheless what we must do is to continue to wrestle with how this can be carried out in today's conditions. We are in a very different world from the beginning of William Still's ministry in

## Contents

- 1 Editorial
- 5 Two Generations Adrift  
*Neil Dougall*
- 13 God-given Rights and  
'Natural Law'  
*David Holloway*
- 19 Come, Lord Jesus  
*Bob Fyall*
- 22 Concerning Preaching  
*William Philip*
- 34 Ann Allen meets  
Mike Parker
- 37 Book reviews

1945. Even very different from when the House was founded in 1983.

### **The Current Situation**

In some places a folk memory lingers of a society of two or three generations ago when the church was at the centre of community and would be part of the control in which people lived their lives, when you went to church you would meet the local postman, the lady who owned the village shop and the primary school head-teacher. This was essentially a rural and small-town phenomenon. In cities stories are still told of how people flocked to hear preachers of the past like JS Stewart. Society has changed beyond recognition.

At least four factors have brought about the change. The first is that we live in a consumer society. This means we choose churches as we choose places to shop – and the criterion for both is whether we like them. To some extent this has long happened in large towns and cities and is inevitable in a highly mobile society. This means, on the whole, a weakening of loyalties to a particular church and a widespread indifference to denominational distinctives. This is not a bad thing in itself but it can lead to a rather inward-looking individualism.

Secondly people seem to live increasingly busy lives. Fewer and fewer are available to do many of the things needed for a church to survive let alone prosper. Middle-aged people are ground down by heavier and heavier workloads and find it difficult to have any greater commitment than turning up to church exhausted on a Sunday.

Thirdly there is a widespread distrust of authority and institution that also affects politics, education and the police. We live in a sceptical and questioning age where people are indisposed to listen to certainties and where authoritative pronouncements are treated with little respect.

Fourthly, there is a widespread distrust of worldviews that claim to give access to the whole of reality. This phenomenon, often referred to as post-modernism, is quite happy for

## ***The one heresy in post-modernism is to say that there is heresy***

Christians to have their own world-view provided they do not attempt to impose it on others. Such a climate is hostile to evangelism and indeed intolerant of it. The one heresy in post-modernism is to say that there is heresy. This often shows itself in the contempt of the media for evangelicals and the use of the word 'fundamentalists' which brackets them with the Taleban and the most violent elements in religious and cultural conflicts.

Much more could be said, and the evidence of these and other trends are all around us, and have been commented on by many writers. It would be easy simply to give up and concentrate on our own patch, and having been involved in church ministry for many years I can understand the temptation. The sheer workload of ministers and others in routine matters leaves little energy for visionary leadership. I hope this editorial will be read as an encouragement to those engaged in a preaching and teaching ministry and not as a call to add yet another layer of activities to overburdened schedules.

### **What shall we do?**

There is no simple formula that will fill the pulpits of the land with vigorous, relevant and gracious preachers. But we have to begin by recognising that our preaching must take account of the vastly changed situation. I want to suggest five areas that bear on the effectiveness of our preaching ministry. Let me remind you, I am not talking of marginalising preaching and replacing it with something else. Rather I am suggesting ways in which we can, by the grace of God, become more effective.

The first relates to the context. Traditionally Christian education has been for children and it has been assumed that adults will have sufficient background to profit from the Sunday sermons. In earlier generations and in

***A greater involvement in leading worship ...  
creates a powerful visual that this is not  
something the minister does while others sit  
passively***

places where the preaching was good exposition that probably worked well enough. Now we are in a situation where people coming new to faith have no Biblical background at all. They may not even know that the Bible has two testaments. We need to make our churches into learning communities. Discipleship classes, evangelistic Bible studies, house groups exploring further the passages preached on Sunday and other such activities are vital if the Sunday preaching is to be fully heard. This will have a two-way effect. Good preaching will inspire and energise these smaller groups and they in turn will underline the importance of the word of God governing the congregation's life. People will see that Bible study is not something the minister does for them but rather is the wellspring of their spiritual lives. Similarly, good pulpit preaching and teaching will provide a benchmark for individuals and groups in their own studies.

Second, there is a matter of style and presentation. One of the welcome developments in recent years has been an increasing concentration on the literary genres of Scripture. If we are committed to believing that Scripture is the Word of God the *how* God says what he does is vitally important and that must be reflected in our preaching. Many books have been written and many conferences held with helpful and practical suggestions. This is not the place to write at length on this matter, but two observations are worth making. Firstly, in spite of many voices to the contrary, it is not necessary to preach 'narrative sermons' in order to do justice to Biblical narrative. The story is there already in all its power, allusiveness and richness. What we need to do is to have regard to the conventions of narrative and be faithful to

these as we wrestle with how the eternal Gospel speaks into our day.

Secondly, we must use all the different genres to give continual variety and interest to our preaching. There is no such thing as a 'no-go' area in Scripture. We need to ransack and proclaim the whole word of God, preaching on books such as Song of Songs and 2nd Kings as well as John and Romans.

Third, there is the whole question of accessibility. This is partly a matter of style and ethos but goes deeper. We must never confuse a commitment to the centrality of preaching as a commitment to a particular style of preaching or a particular kind of service. A greater involvement in leading worship, in prayer, in giving children's talks, in music and other ways creates a powerful visual that this is not something the minister does while others sit passively. I know the most valuable thing any congregation can do for their preacher is to pray for him. That said it is vital that others take part in public worship as well. In my years in Durham I found that very far from distracting from the centrality of preaching, this kind of fellowship in actual services freed the preacher to concentrate on that supremely important task. Incidentally, and this may form the substance of a future editorial, many who are now serving the Lord in a variety of ministries gained their early experience of leading and preaching in that way. This also has a beneficial effect on newcomers in that there are several public figures in the church they can relate to.

Accessibility includes content as well as style. Illustrations used, language employed must be such that people, particularly young people, can relate to. I confess that I am an incurable quoter — Shakespeare, C. S. Lewis are among my repertoire. However, we must also be familiar with the programmes people watch, the papers they read, the music they listen to. Working with an overwhelmingly student congregation forces an engagement with the changing world. None of this in any way detracts from the power and depth of

the Gospel. The same applies to power-point, music groups and other contemporary ways of embodying the Eternal word.

A fourth issue is the concept of teamwork. This is related to encouraging the wider ministry of the congregation and how this can be modelled by the leadership. Preaching is hard work; there is really no substitute for hours of diligent labour over the text with all the helps we can find as well as studying the contemporary scene. This is why the main preaching ministry must be in the hands of those who have been called, trained and have the time to spend in that kind of study. However, there will usually be others who, while not having the time and training for regular ministry, will nevertheless have gifts which can be used to help with the preaching ministry. I am not just speaking of Elders, although their training has been and will continue to be a feature of the work of Rutherford House. We need to think imaginatively of training and equipping others – e.g. student workers, youth workers, lay assistants and others. They need to be well trained in the Bible as well as in techniques of e.g. youth work and trained to teach others. One product of such practice could well be a new pool of recruits for the ordained ministry. It is further important that such people receive feedback and help to improve their practice.

A fifth area relates to the wider national and international context in which we minister. One of the great gains of the last half-century has been the increase in numbers of Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. It is now difficult to find any part of the nation where it is impossible to find a Biblical ministry. That is surely something for which to thank God. Yet that is clearly not enough. We have much to learn, and as someone who has ministered in England for the last fourteen years, I believe there must be much more interaction with our friends south of the Border. I think in particular we need to become a stronger voice in the nations. English Evangelicals, such as

David Holloway, have been more ready to engage in national debate and to fight the wolf as well as feed the sheep. It is not for this journal to attempt to describe how such a national debate should happen, and I know that such discussions and debates already happen. What is vital is that these should be seen as an outflow of our indispensable work of teaching the Bible. However, it is vital to share insights and plan strategically.

I want to address briefly two kinds of response that might be made to this Editorial. Some people as they read this might well say 'we're doing all this.' If that is so, God bless you, I rejoice and would love to hear of your work. On the other hand, some might be saying 'what we need is a work of the Spirit and our responsibility is to keep on steadily at the work'. To that too I would say 'Amen'. Unless the Spirit blows through the dry bones nothing will be achieved. Yet I would also argue that faithfulness in our day means addressing such issues as those discussed in this Editorial. I am above all concerned that we work together for the glory of God, the building up of his people and the salvation of many in this country and beyond.

We need both realism and vision. We need realism that does not overestimate what we can do in a year, nor underestimate what we can do in five. We need the vision of the great multitude which no-one can count before the throne of God and of the Lamb. That is what the future of the church is and nothing can prevent that, but such a vision will not lead to complacency; rather it will provide an inspiration to pray faithfully and work diligently that the unchanging Gospel will be heard and believed in our changing world.

#### **Note from our new Director and Editor, Dr Bob Fyall**

*Since this is the first issue of the Journal I am editing it would be useful to say a few words about the articles and the general direction.*

*In the Editorial I set out my stall, both reaffirming the commitment to preaching and saying something about the vastly different circumstances in which we proclaim the Gospel. I have included the final sermon of my ministry in Durham which tries to encapsulate the great themes of Scripture.*

*As well as being an example of an expository sermon which was part of a series in that connection, there is an edited version of a longer paper by Willie Philip on preaching. This is a powerful plea for a truly Biblical preaching which is life changing.*

*Developing some of the emphases of the Editorial there is a challenging article by Neil Dougall on ways in which we might reach the unchurched generations and a fascinating account of an alternative service he and Gordon Palmer ran monthly.*

*Another concern was to encourage a Christian voice in public affairs and there is a stirring article by David Holloway on human rights. David is vicar of Jesmond Parish Church in Newcastle and a powerful voice in the media in the cause of the Gospel. We need to cultivate closer links with our evangelical friends south of the border. Ann Allen interviews Mike Parker, the recently appointed General Secretary of Evangelical Alliance, Scotland, and we look forward to working with him.*

**This Journal is designed to be a resource to help ministers, elders and all involved in different ministries. We want to make it as useful as possible and we welcome comments and suggestions. If there are areas which you think need comment please let us know.**

# Two generations adrift

Neil Dougall, North Berwick

*Some thoughts on worship, gathered together by Neil Dougall, and submitted to the Board of Ministry of the Church of Scotland as the fruit of two weeks' study leave in May 2003.*

Worship in most congregations of the Church of Scotland both lacks variety and is two generations out of step from the leading edge of contemporary culture. What might be regarded as contemporary or progressive in some congregations is probably still one generation out of step. The path of evolution (incremental change) cannot bridge the two-generation-gap. Revolution (radical change) will be needed. A congregation or a group of congregations should aim to maintain the Traditional form for one generation, evolve this Traditional form for a second generation and create something very different for a third generation.

## Where I'm coming from

I have been minister of St David's Broomhouse Church for the last 12 years. During this time, considerable

changes have been made to our worship. Concerned to make worship relevant and accessible to people today, I have encouraged constant and gradual change. The elders have been very supportive, most of the congregation have welcomed it and the minority who find it difficult have tolerated this. I suspect that many in the denomination would regard our worship as quite progressive. Nonetheless, I am increasingly aware of the gap there is between church and society. I suspect that, despite all the changes we have introduced, the gap is now wider than it was in 1991. The way we conduct worship is meaningful for those who attend regularly but is not scratching where other folk are itching. Part of the missionary challenge facing the church today is to create worship experiences which they find meaningful, attractive and relevant.

During two week's study leave in May 2003, I have reflected on this. I have been stimulated by attending two conferences, *Religious Trends in Western Society*, a day conference at New College, Edinburgh and *The Changing World, the Changing Church* organised by the Bible Society (English as

opposed to Scottish). Both during study leave and in the months beforehand I have read on the topic of church and culture. I have also benefited from many conversations with colleagues.

A huge amount has been written about the changing culture in which the church finds itself. Many writers talk about the church needing to reimagine itself in order to reconnect with the people on its doorstep. I have found some of the analysis very helpful. I do not need to be persuaded that the church will need to change radically in order to reconnect with the people. The difficulty however, lies in applying this to the reality of church life today. There is not a blank sheet of paper. The church exists in a particular form at present. Worship and patterns of congregational life cannot simply be changed at the drop of a hat.

My aim, therefore, in this paper is not to review the literature but to reflect on my own experience. I will try to avoid the theoretical, and instead try to apply some of the thinking about church and culture to the congregation and parish I minister in.

### Cutting the cake

There are many different ways of cutting the cake of contemporary society. John Drane suggests for example that there are seven broad groups of people: desperate poor, hedonists, traditionalists, spiritual searchers, corporate achievers, secularists and apathetic.<sup>1</sup> Alan Jamieson (building on the work of James Fowler) identifies people in terms of stages of faith – the innocent, the literalist, the loyalist, the critic, the seer and the saint.<sup>2</sup> These, and other perspectives, help me to understand the sort of people the church is trying to connect with and the way they see life. However as a framework for church life it's too complicated.

***Where our grandparents just wanted to survive, and our parents wanted to maximise pleasure, my generation simply want to minimise pain by having the fittest body and the largest bank account possible***

Instead therefore I want to adopt a generational model. One writer says: 'Where our grandparents just wanted to survive, and our parents wanted to maximise pleasure, my generation simply want to minimise pain by having the fittest body and the largest bank account possible.'<sup>3</sup> He is suggesting that just after the war the name of the game was survival. In the 50's and 60's as prosperity increased people threw off shackles; pleasure was what they wanted from life. Today's young people are different again. Avoiding pain is their preoccupation. This snapshot does, I think, encapsulate three quite distinct generations. They view life quite differently because their life experiences have been very different. The first generation are those born up to the end of Second World War and are often called Builders. The second generation are

those born between 1946 and 1964 and are often called Boomers. The third generation are those born after 1964 and are often called Busters or Generation X. (Most people would introduce a fourth generation, those born after 1984, called Mosaics on generation Y. In order to keep things simple I will treat third and fourth generation as a single group.)

Put simply, church as it exists today 'works' for Builders, attracts some Boomers, but is a complete turn-off for almost all of Generation X. It is not just that the church is able to hold onto Builders as they age, it also attracts new people from this generation. One of the few areas of significant church growth at the end of twentieth century was among older people.<sup>4</sup> The church has an important ministry to this age group which needs to be well led and adequately resourced. However that must not blind us to the need to connect with those who are younger too.

No one likes to be pigeonholed. All the frameworks I've mentioned need to be treated as descriptive rather than prescriptive. When I use a generational model, I do not mean that everyone who was born at a particular time will be like this. Rather these simply describe characteristics which are fairly common among people of a certain age. The church should be inclusive too. It may plan worship in order to attract people of a particular age, but will be thrilled if people from a very different age group find this form meaningful.

### The shop window

I have chosen to focus this discussion around worship. To my mind there are three fundamental dynamics to being the church, namely, worship, fellowship and mission. All three are essential. If any one of the three is absent that group of people ceases to be truly church. It is possible to use any of the three as the primary dynamic for shaping the life of the church, provided that the other two are constantly brought into play. For example Stuart Murray

argues that mission should be the primary dynamic.<sup>5</sup> Steven Croft in arguing for small communities to be at the heart of the church seems to me to be making fellowship the primary dynamic.<sup>6</sup>

However, while both make persuasive cases, I still think that worship is primary, for both theological and pragmatic reasons. Encounter with God lies at the heart of our faith. It is this encounter which creates faith and sustains it. It is this encounter which underlies fellowship and gives impetus to mission. Equally, from the pragmatic perspective, worship is the shop window of the church. When outsiders think of church, they think of what happens when the church gathers to worship God. People still drop in to worship. The nature of that event frequently has a major impact on their continuing spiritual search.

#### One size fits all

I think there are two fundamental problems with the form and style of worship that is common within the Church of Scotland. There is only colour on offer, and it's black. I am referring to Henry's Ford remark, 'You can have any colour you want, as long as it's black.'

Our form of worship reflects the industrial age of mass production. When Henry Ford produced his Model T, people adapted their lives to fit the one style and colour that was offered. At that time life was relatively uniform. Church life which emerged during the industrial era focused on a single service of worship which followed a set form. Implicit within Church of Scotland thinking is the notion that there is a standard pattern of worship which will connect with the majority of people.

For those who have grown up within this pattern it seems the most obvious and natural way to worship God. There is no doubt, it 'works' for them. Given this, there is no reason why they should change. The problem, however, is these same people also wonder why so few young people attend their

church. They expect younger people to find the same form of worship meaningful. In Henry Ford's language, they can't understand why another generation prefer blue or red or yellow and are not content with black.

We now live in the age of mass customisation, where 'people are delivered only what information or products conform with their predetermined wishes and distinctive sizes.' The church therefore needs to bury the notion that there is one form of worship which will connect with most people. Instead it should offer a range of worship events. In what follows I want to reflect on my own experience in order to suggest what these events might look like and how they could be created.

*They expect younger people to find the same form of worship meaningful. In Henry Ford's language, they can't understand why another generation prefer blue or red or yellow and are not content with black*

#### Traditional worship

The National Gallery of Scotland contains a painting by John Henry Lorimer entitled, 'The Ordination of Elders in a Scottish Kirk' (see below). It was painted in 1891 and it is striking how similar it seems to the Church of Scotland today. Granted today women might be involved, but in all other important respects little seems to have changed. Interestingly, the men who posed for Lorimer were a carter, a blacksmith and a labourer, the first two being occupations which have almost disappeared entirely.

What I term traditional worship is what normally happens in a Church of Scotland on a Sunday. Indeed, it is the basic template of Sunday worship in St David's. The dynamics of this are very formal. The congregation sit passively in rows. There is little interaction either with each other or with the per-

son leading the service. This person fulfils the role of an expert, speaking to God on behalf of the congregation in the prayers and then speaking to the congregation for twenty minutes during the sermon.

Most church buildings were designed with this kind of worship in mind. Sitting in pews, the congregation focuses on the preacher. The preacher stands literally six feet above contradiction. Sitting facing the back of other people's head makes interaction with others difficult. The difficulty of moving from your seat makes movement and participation more bother than its worth.

Most of the hymns sung during this kind of service were already in existence when Lorimer painted.

There is no doubt traditional worship meets the spiritual needs of a certain group of people. Its value for them should not be underestimated. At the same time though it must be recognised that it is a constantly dwindling pool of people. One factor in the church's decline is, I believe, its insistence that this kind of worship is normative. I suspect John Drane may be right when he says: 'Ironically, we Christians have talked and written more about the need for change and renewal during the second half of the twentieth century than at any other time in church history and, with one or two notable exceptions, it is hard to think of any previous comparable period when so little change has actually taken place. Our ways of being church at the start of the twenty-first century are virtually unchanged from what was going on in the nineteenth.'<sup>9</sup>

#### All age worship

During my time at St David's we have had an All Age Worship service approximately every six weeks. The stimulus for this was a desire to create a bridge for children who came regularly to Launchpad (Sunday School in traditional language) and Sunday worship, which it was hoped, they would one day be part of.

As this has developed over the years

I have consciously tried to alter some of the dynamics of traditional worship. Instead of formality I have aimed for informality; instead of spectating, there is participation; instead of solely using words, I incorporate images; instead of long talks, there will be a number of short talks; instead of sitting still, movement is encouraged; instead of Victorian hymns, twentieth century praise is sung.

These services began with children in mind. It soon became clear that some adults did not just enjoy these services, but found them spiritually meaningful too. Reflecting on this, I realised that it was important that they were genuinely All Age services, rather than simply children's services. In an All Age service, there should be something for people of every age. Therefore somewhere I aim to have something aimed at the adults, perhaps a five minute slot where I try and communicate at an adult level, even though I realise it will go right over children's heads.

There is no doubt that crafting All Age Services has shaped my leading of worship. Our traditional worship is less traditional than it might otherwise have been. Ideas and ways of doing things introduced in All Age services have found their way into more traditional worship. Nevertheless, I still felt that the worship being offered at St David's was too restricted. If we were to connect with those who did not

### *Church as your granny never knew it*

usually come to church, a more accessible form of worship was needed.

altw@7

Two years ago, altw@7 was born. My colleague, Gordon Palmer at Slateford Longstone Church, and I decided to create a new kind of worship event aimed at those who had no personal church history. We gave it the name altw@7, with the strap line, 'Church as your granny never knew it.' altw@7



takes place on the last Sunday of the month at 7 pm and draws people from three congregations.

In altw@7 we have tried to change the dynamics of worship. The venues we use have flexible seating, and the normal pattern is for people to sit around tables. The event begins with refreshment, people take their drinks to the place they will sit. There is a close connection between refreshment and people feeling relaxed. As well as creating an informal atmosphere (helped too by the complete absence of ties and clerical attire by those leading), another essential principle is participation. There is a theme for each altw@7. The leader talks about this but there is always participation. Sometimes people chat about issues at particular points during the presentation. Other times the main part happens at different places round the building, with people getting up and going to take part in these places. The third principle is that it is multisensory. Extensive use is made of a data projector: pictures, video clips, photos and fine art images are used. Tactile and craft activities feature from time to time. Music is important too. Rather than being organ based the singing is guitar led. Recorded music of different genres is utilised, particularly at times when reflection is being encouraged.

altw@7 has been running for 18 months attracting between 40 and 60 people of all ages. Feedback from them

and have not allowed a church clientele to blunt the concept. Nevertheless the question arises why is it that altw@7 has failed to connect with the people we had in mind? Two possible answers suggest themselves, content and promotion.

Reflecting on the relationship between church and culture, I think there are things to be learnt about content – of which more in a moment. At the same time, however, I still think there is a significant group of people, who do not normally come to church, who are spiritually receptive and would find altw@7 attractive. We have failed to connect with them because the people who do come to altw@7 are either insulated within a Christian subculture, or lack the confidence to invite friends to anything to do with church. That is a very different subject which I will not attempt to explore now.

#### Generation Two – Boomers

Earlier I suggested that a generational analysis might be helpful. My experience suggests that it is people born before 1945 who generally, though not exclusively, find traditional worship meaningful. I wonder if part of this lies in their experience of church when they were children. Most people of this age had some experience of church as children. Even if they never attended worship as adults this experience of worship is buried in their psyche. If in later years a spiritual sense is awakened in them, traditional church resonates with them, whereas something like altw@7 is utterly foreign.

On reflection I think that the All Age Worship and altw@7 is likely to appeal to people who were born between 1945 and 1964. A substantial proportion of these will have attended church as children, if only in a school context. They too have some kind of experience of church in their subconscious. Both All Age services and altw@7 maintain the connection to that, whilst pushing the boundaries. The dynamics of worship have been altered but a familiar framework is still

*it seems to touch parts of them that other forms of worship do not reach*

suggests that they find this form of worship very helpful. To coin a phrase it seems to touch parts of them that other forms of worship do not reach.

However, almost all these people are already involved in the life of the church and do attend traditional worship. Thus far altw@7 has failed to connect with the group it was originally intended for. I believe that we have kept faith with the original idea

discernible.

The conclusion I come to is that traditional worship can evolve and be adapted to provide an experience which many Boomers and their primary school-age children find meaningful. To the devotee of traditional worship the connection to traditional worship may seem invisible, yet underneath the surface I think it is there.

#### Mid-point

If my argument so far holds, two conclusions seem to follow:

First, if a congregation has only the resources to sustain one worship event, then it should be more akin to All Age worship than to Traditional worship. If there are three generations, worship focused on the mid-generation will be the most accessible, in that nobody will be more than one generation removed from this.

Second, if a congregation is able to sustain more than one worship event, then the All Age type of worship should be given the most attractive time slot. From listening to colleagues who have a Traditional and All Age service it appears that the time of the Traditional service is picked first and the All Age one has to fit round it.

#### Problems with altw@7

I have indicated that at its inception altw@7 was intended for those who had no personal church history. With the benefit of hindsight I think that the event we created was too churchy to connect with this group, particularly at its younger end. Underneath the skin of altw@7 a traditional worship framework exists. It has a structure, most notably expressed in corporate singing at the beginning and the end. It has a message and, although part of it is discovered through participation, it is fundamentally delivered by the person leading.

***From TV (Friends) to fashion (Jennifer Lopez), from sport (David Beckham) to music, Generation X sets the trends and everyone else follows suit, except for the church***

#### The third generation

Generation X are vital for the church, not just because they are the future, but because they are the dominant generation in shaping society. Youth culture is not just the culture of young people, it's the culture which shapes everyone's life. Most people aspire to be younger than they are, most people like to be with it. From TV (*Friends*) to fashion (*Jennifer Lopez*), from sport (*David Beckham*) to music, Generation X sets the trends and everyone else follows suit, except for the church. It seems to me, that on the whole, the life and worship of the Church of Scotland is two generations adrift from the leading edge of our culture.

Reflecting on my experience of ministry, I think that evolution cannot close this gap. In order to connect with this generation, trying slowly to change inherited patterns of worship will not be enough. The framework itself needs to be replaced. We need to develop a new kind of worship event, beginning with a blank sheet of paper.

#### Raven

St Cuthbert's church in the West End of Edinburgh has many clubs within its parish. Out of a concern to reach the young people who frequented these clubs, a group was born which called

itself, 'Exploring Church for Club Culture,' and has since evolved into 'Raven'. Two years ago I was asked to join a steering group of people from the established church who work in partnership with the people within this group to facilitate its development. From this involvement I have gained some ideas about what church for some in Generation X might look like, together with some of the challenges raised.

Pete Ward has written a short provocative book entitled *Liquid Church*. In it he addresses the issues I have mentioned. He speaks of 'the growing feeling among some adults and young people that church needs to be different to connect with cultural sensibilities.'<sup>1</sup> He argues for a 'shift from seeing church as a gathering of people meeting in one place at one time – that is, a congregation – to a notion of church as a series of relationships and communications.'<sup>1</sup> Throughout he uses as his primary metaphor, liquid.

Traditional church he calls solid – that is it has a fixed form. It is stable, recognisable and slow to change. A liquid, by comparison, has no shape of its own. A liquid is shaped by whatever container it is in at that moment. Liquids are always changing their shape and their appearance. They are inherently unformed.

I find the metaphor of liquid very helpful in expressing the nature of Raven. Raven is a very fluid group of people and its almost impossible to define what it means to be part of Raven. There is a small core who are part of Raven most of the time. Then there are others who are part for a short time, before they move on again. Then there are others who are part of Raven over a longer period, but who come and go on a periodic basis. Raven is explicitly spiritual and Christian. Yet thus far the community have failed to establish a worship rhythm that is right for them. For some months there was a sense that some kind of worship event on a Sunday evening needed to be the fixed point to create a rhythm. This event

was very informal, participative and varied. Yet recently, even this was felt to be too fixed and, so at present, there is no commitment to any corporate worship event.

In among this fluidity there have been two focused weeks of constant prayer (24-7, people praying right round the clock for an entire week). Many people have found a safe and open atmosphere to explore spiritual issues. Many have found a place to gather themselves for the demands they face at work or through studying. Many have found a place to belong and to be accepted.

One year ago Raven left the nest. For various reasons the time came to move from being a group, within St Cuthbert's, to having an identity of its own. This transition has absorbed a great deal of energy and perhaps explains why community life has failed to develop this last year. Therefore any conclusions that I draw at this stage can only be tentative. Perhaps a year from now the shape and identity of Raven will be much clearer and the conclusions drawn firmer.

#### **Worship with Generation X**

This is a fluid generation. Constant change is part of their lives. Worship needs to be fluid, able to change significantly and frequently. The difficulty with fluidity however, is continuity. Unless there is a core of people who can provide this, it is difficult to maintain the group. There maybe a role for traditional church in providing containers that the liquid church of a new generation can fill.

This generation dislikes hierarchy and authority. It is consensual and participative. Those who lead worship will play the role of a midwife-teacher rather than a banker-teacher. John Drane uses these terms to distinguish the traditional teacher who deposits knowledge in student's head, from a new kind of teacher who works with the student to bring understanding to life.<sup>12</sup> The difficulty lies in finding people who are fluid enough to understand this kind of role, yet static enough

***A church building,  
old or new, conveys  
a message and this  
may not be the  
message intended  
by the congregation  
which uses it***

to offer this leadership over a period of time.

This is a generation who sense the ambiguity of life. Therefore worship will focus on the mystery of God and will be rich in symbol. Rather than rationality and words worship will be multisensory and heavily dependent on images.

This is a generation with a very practical concern for the world, who are offended by what they see the hypocrisy of many in traditional church. Therefore the connection between worship and action will be clear. Faith will be seen in holistic way, that is concerned with all of life rather than simply with spiritual issues.

#### **Music and Buildings**

The final reflection I want to offer concerns two factors, which I recognise I have paid insufficient attention to in the past – music and buildings. In my ministry I have accepted these as givens – there is a church building we have inherited, and there are certain musicians available who can lead a particular kind of worship. From a practical point of view these are givens. However I now realise they have a profound effect on worship. By not paying enough attention to them I suspect that Traditional worship has continued to colour my attempts to create worship events for other generations.

Rick Warren says that choosing the style of music is the most critical and controversial decision church leaders face because it 'positions' your church.

'Music is the primary communicator of values to the younger generation.'<sup>13</sup> Andy Hickford explains how this has affected the church's attempts to connect with the younger generation. Music, which to the ears of Traditional church is contemporary, is not. Contemporary song writers like John Bell and Graham Kendrick create praise which has 'basically a hymn style musically and an objective message lyrically.'<sup>14</sup> This style of music 'works' for Boomers, but not for Generation X.

By contrast, Hickford refers to Martin Smith and Matt Redman who did not grow up in a hymn culture and whose music reflects chart music. Its not possible 'to lead this style of music from a piano or organ'. The lyrics have dropped biblical language 'and allowed the message to become more oblique and at times deliberately vague. They (have) also included a massive injection of hope, anticipation and longing for revival. The meaning (comes) through pictures more than principle, and above all the music (is) passionate.'<sup>15</sup>

On buildings Stuart Murray offers this insight. 'A church building, old or new, conveys a message and this may not be the message intended by the congregation which uses it. Architecture, size, design, furnishings, colour, light, temperature, ease of access, audibility, 'feel' and a host of other factors powerfully affect those who use a building.'<sup>16</sup>

The building worship takes place in, and the music used in worship are probably two of the most significant factors in creating an atmosphere and a style. Rather than accepting these as givens I think they need to be thought through, with creative ways discovered of providing alternatives that fit the kind of worship event being created.

#### **Conclusion**

'We are reminded that any church is potentially just one generation away from extinction. Now we are faced with a generation of people under thirty-five who are turning away from

institutional expressions of Christianity and opting to define their own spiritual journey. Therefore churches in the West must recognize that they face a missionary challenge that is more urgent and radical that it has been for many generations.<sup>17</sup>

In this statement Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey echo a sentiment expressed by many writers on the church today. As one amongst the many things the church can do to address this I am suggesting that it needs to consciously and deliberately begin to offer a number of different worship events aimed at particular generations. Some larger churches may be able to offer three quite different worship events, but most will struggle. However I suspect that, by working collaboratively, churches in an area could combine their resources and divide the workload so that, between them, worship which connects with people belonging to three different generations might be offered.

**Bibliography**

Christian Research, *12 Things to Wake up to*, 1999  
Croft Steven, *Transforming Communities*, DLT, 2002  
Drane John, *The McDonaldization of the Church*, DLT, 2000  
Gibbs, Eddie & Coffey, Ian, *Church Next*, IVP, 2001  
Hickford Andy, *Essential Youth*, Kingsway, 1998  
Jamieson Alan, *A Churchless Faith*, SPCK, 2002  
Murray Stuart, *Church Planting*, Paternoster, 1998  
Schuchardt, Read Mercer, *The Radiation Sickness of the Soul in The Bible in Transmission*, Bible Society, Summer, 2002  
Sweet Leonard, *SoulTsunami*, Zondervan, 1999  
Ward Pete, *Liquid Church*, Paternoster, 2002  
Warren Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Zondervan, 1995

<sup>1</sup> *The McDonaldization of the Church*, p 60 -78.  
<sup>2</sup> *A Churchless Faith*, p 110 - 120  
<sup>3</sup> *The Bible in Transmission*, Summer 2002, p 16.  
<sup>4</sup> *12 Things to Wake Up To*, p 6.  
<sup>5</sup> *Church Planting*, p 49 ff  
<sup>6</sup> *Transforming Communities*  
<sup>7</sup> *SoulTsunami*, p 291  
<sup>8</sup> Photograph by Antonia Reeves, c Trustees of the National Gallery of Scotland.  
<sup>9</sup> *The McDonaldization of the Church*, p 32  
<sup>10</sup> *Liquid Church*, p 4  
<sup>11</sup> *Liquid Church*, p 2  
<sup>12</sup> *The McDonaldization of the Church*, p 177  
<sup>13</sup> *Purpose Driven Church*, p 280  
<sup>14</sup> *Essential Youth*, p 171  
<sup>15</sup> *Essential Youth*, p 171  
<sup>16</sup> *Church Planting* p 211  
<sup>17</sup> *Church Next*, p11.

# God-given Rights and 'Natural Law'

David Holloway, Newcastle

## *'British Airways and Gay Pride'*

On Monday 28 July 2003 *The Times* newspaper had the headline reporting the words of Rod Eddington, the *British Airways'* chief executive: 'We have no God-given right to survive'.

He issued this warning and referred to 'God-given rights' after the walk-out by check-in staff and the loss of millions of pounds' worth of business.

The day before newspapers were reporting the Gay Pride event in London. For the first time, with the blessing of the police authorities, 'gay police came out with pride'. Prominent in the event was Commander Brian Paddick, Britain's highest ranking openly gay officer. Paddick, you may remember, was removed from his post at Lambeth after the Metropolitan Police Authority wrote to him saying he 'demonstrated lack of judgment'. This was following allegations by his ex-boyfriend that he allowed cannabis to be used at his home.

But — it is claimed — there are gay 'rights'. So, of course, the Commander should get top billing. Others undoubtedly claim a 'right' to take cannabis. Indeed, many activities that others classify as wrong or immoral are today being claimed as

'rights'. Laws are then being annulled or passed to enforce these 'rights' while often proposals to underline 'God-given rights' are not passed. For example, in July in the wake of the Government's determination to repeal Section 28 — the law banning local councils from promoting homosexuality — the House of Lords failed to pass a proposal of Lady Blatch to give strong safeguards for parents in place of Section 28 (of the two bishops present the Bishop of Newcastle voted against and the Bishop of Manchester voted for the proposal).

What, therefore, are 'rights'? How do they differ from 'moral' or 'God-given rights'? Is there a difference? Can you claim 'a right' to anything? People, today, are certainly trying!

## God-given or moral rights

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the English utilitarian philosopher, described the idea of moral rights as 'nonsense upon stilts'. To such people rights are mere human conventions. To them there are no moral rights or

absolute rights as a divine gift because there is no divine giver.

Now this is not to deny there may be legal rights. These, of course, come from enactments of Parliament; and, because they have the backing of the courts and the police, they can be enforced. So in reality they just come from the wishes (or whims) of MPs. Such rights are human creations and nothing more, *unless*, as believers claim, they coincide with God-given rights. The concept of "human rights", as it has developed in the Western democratic world with its rule of law, was rooted in a firm belief in an absolute, God-given moral law. This, if you like, is a 'primary law' behind all human laws. Paul's words in his letter to the Romans (chapter 2.14-15) have been crucial in this thinking:

When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts,

their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Theologians refer to this as part of God's *general* revelation which comes through nature and in the human conscience. This parallels God's common grace – 'your Father in heaven', said Jesus, 'causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Mt. 5.45).

General revelation and common grace, however, are to be distinguished from God's *special* revelation found now in the Bible and his *saving* grace seen at the Cross and received through faith in Christ alone. So the good news (or the 'gospel') relates to that special revelation and saving grace. But it has to be preached in the context of God's general revelation and common grace.

#### **Greek and Roman formulations of 'natural law'**

Paul, in all probability, knew the consensus of the Greeks and the Romans over what they termed 'natural law' or 'the law of nature'. Cicero, Seneca and the Roman jurists were clear and so was the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Referring to this natural law, Cicero says,

'it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting... It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for He is the author of this law, its promulgator,

and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment.'

With Paul confirming this pagan consensus, the early post-apostolic church accepted the concept of a universal standard of conduct, morally binding on all men, and intuited potentially by all. It then came to be a fundamental part of jurisprudence and political philosophy. And Christians saw that God had made this eternal law clearer in the Ten Commandments after sin had dulled human perceptions. But there was no fundamental disagreement. It all seemed obvious to the majority of Christians. At the Reformation for the most part the Reformers accepted much of the inherited teaching of the Roman Catholic church on natural law. They gave, however, different emphases.

#### **The Reformers**

The Continental Reformer Calvin defined natural law as follows:

'natural law is that apprehension of the conscience which distinguishes sufficiently between just and unjust, and which deprives men of the excuse of ignorance while it proves them guilty by their own testimony.'

The Anglican Reformer Hooker sometimes used the term 'the law of reason' instead of 'natural law'. Commenting on Rom. 2.14 he says Paul's meaning,

'... is, that by force of the light of reason wherewith God illuminateth everyone which cometh into the world, men, being enabled to know the truth from falsehood and good from evil, do thereby learn in many things what the will of God is; which

***General revelation and common grace, however, are to be distinguished from God's special revelation found now in the Bible and his saving grace seen at the Cross and received through faith in Christ alone***

***The American Revolution was not anti-Christian at all. But the French Revolution was very different. It was influenced by deists or very secular Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot***

will himself not revealing by any extraordinary means unto them, but they, by natural discourse attaining the knowledge thereof, seem the makers of those laws which indeed are his, and they but only the finders of them out.'

Hooker, like Calvin, knew that men could and did 'suppress the truth by their wickedness' and natural law was not the gospel. But they both knew it was a fact. So did John Locke at the end of the 17th century. 'It is certain there is such a law (the law of nature), and that, too, as intelligible and plain to a rational creature and a studier of that law as the positive laws of commonwealths (laws voted by parliaments).'

**The early 'modern' period**

Then in the 18th century 'human rights' came to the fore in connection with natural law – not unreasonably as many basic rights were being denied. You had the classic statement of human rights in the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, the basis of which were 'the Laws of Nature and Nature's God'. A few years later you had the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. Significantly it lost entirely the concept of natural law and the connection of human rights with divine law. This declaration was 'deist'. Deism was a religion that was anti-Christian and posited just a 'supreme being' who really took little interest in the day-to-day world. So these French rights were merely asserted (interestingly Bentham was made a citizen of the French Republic in 1792). The Declaration was so different from the American Declaration. There Thomas Jefferson wrote:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that *they are endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable Rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'

He subsequently wrote that this was in

the tradition of 'the elementary books of public right as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke ... etc.' So, why the difference?

America, a few years earlier, had experienced the Great Awakening, with the ministry of men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. The American Revolution was not anti-Christian at all. But the French Revolution was very different. It was influenced by deists or very secular Enlightenment thinkers like Diderot, the philosopher and editor of the *Encyclopédie* (1751–80). He was, indeed, anti-Christian. He famously wanted to 'strangle the last king with the entrails of the last priest' and claimed that 'posterity is for the philosopher what the other world is for the religious.'

Not surprisingly, with the rejection of God-given natural law to ground God-given natural or human rights, rights theories collapsed along with an interest in natural law in continental Europe in the 19th century. This interest really only revived with the Second World War. People realized that terrible Nazi laws and executive decisions had to be judged by a higher law. This higher law could then give grounding to genuine human rights. So the Nuremberg Trials gave rise to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.

However, the modern concern with 'civil rights' was generated by the Revd Martin Luther King in the 1960s, not with the United Nations Declaration. Without a renewed faith in 'Nature's God' the UN Declaration did not get off to a good start.

**Martin Luther King**

Martin Luther King was a Baptist minister who first came to national attention in 1955 as the leader of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. This began when a black passenger refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. He was also one of the organizers of the 200,000 strong march on Washington DC in 1963 to demand racial equality. A moderate (and so criticized by black militants) he was nevertheless imprisoned by the authorities

*Lincoln was saying  
that there are  
objective, timeless  
principles of justice,  
by which you measure  
the human creation of  
laws and statutes,  
which at any given  
point may be less  
than desirable*

for his campaigning. He was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968.

With his Christian background, King's civil rights were rooted in what he called 'our Judaeo-Christian heritage'. Writing from Birmingham, Alabama, gaol, he penned these words:

'One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.'

That American Dream was spelled out by Abraham Lincoln, the man who freed the slaves in 1863 and who also was assassinated. Writing in 1857 of those who had written the Declaration of Independence, he said this:

'they defined with tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men created equal – equal in 'certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' This they said, and this they meant. They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the *right*, so that the *enforcement* of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly laboured for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and

augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colours everywhere.'

#### Just and unjust laws

Lincoln was saying that there are objective, timeless principles of justice, by which you measure the human creation of laws and statutes, which at any given point may be less than desirable. He knew that there were just laws and unjust laws. But to distinguish the two you need a higher law by which to judge them. This was Martin Luther King's point:

'Now, what is the difference between the two [just and unjust laws]? ... To put it in the terms of St Thomas Aquinas: an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust [Genesis teaching that man is made in the image of God, proves this]. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority ... Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful.'

But what has happened since Martin Luther King? In the 1970's various 'liberation' movements saw their chance. They sought to identify with the 'race card' and played it for all it was worth. And such was the beginning of 'Gay Liberation'. There was, however, a significant difference between King and the Gay Liberationists. King had been asking for 'human' not 'black' rights. He was claiming the right of blacks to join in the human family. But the Gay Liberationists were demanding the 'gay' right to a form of *behaviour* that was considered by the vast majority as not only deviant but dangerous. Furthermore it was clearly contrary to



the Natural Law tradition which since St Paul had been infused with the basic teachings from Biblical ethics.

#### After King

This is how Robert George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University sees what has happened after Martin Luther King:

'After King's martyrdom many in the civil rights movement lost the moral compass that King's philosophy of natural law and natural rights provided. As traditional liberalism collapsed *under the radical critique* that has produced such phenomena as post-modernism, deconstructionism, radical feminism and the like, many veterans of the civil rights struggle bought into the moral radicalism of what ... (has been) accurately labelled a 'cultural elite'. For this elite, 'natural law' is a mere euphemism for legitimizing the status quo, thus reinforcing structures of domination and power. At the same time, elite opinion rejects as, at best, benighted the idea of objective moral truth. Thus no truly rational critique of racism and other forms of unjust discrimination is possible. There is [now], quite simply, the brute struggle for power.'

George does not spell out the 'radical critique'. To do so we must go back to continental Europe and the 19th century. Without the evangelical revival that Britain and America experienced in the 18th and 19th centuries, both France and Germany were open to spiritual attack. In Germany this came not only in the form of theological liberalism; it also came in the form of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900). He was a German philosopher who rejected the absolute moral standards of the Bible and what he called the 'slave morality' of Christianity. He was the one who said 'God is dead'. So all is permitted and people are free to

create their own values.

'Let us therefore *limit* ourselves ... to the creation of our own new tables of values ... We, however, want to be those who we are — the new, unique, the incomparable, those who give themselves their own law, those who create themselves.'

He spoke about the 'transvaluation of values'.

#### Conclusion

Nietzsche has had a slow but pernicious effect on Western culture. He is the God-Father of post-modernism. And post-modernism with its relativity and pluralism is what the Bible and traditional theology calls 'worldliness'. David Wells puts it like this:

'what today we know as modernity (and especially post-modernity) is, in many ways, giving contemporary expression to what the New Testament pejoratively calls 'the world'. Worldliness is that system of values, in any given age, which has as its centre our fallen human perspective, which displaces God and his truth from the world, and which makes sin look normal and righteousness seem strange. It thus gives great plausibility to what is morally wrong and, for that reason, makes what is wrong seem normal. It is this spiritual reality that is pervasive in modernity.'

A great disciple of Nietzsche in more recent times was the French intellectual Michel Foucault (1926-84). In 1953 he read Nietzsche for the first time, he says, with 'a great passion'. He then created his own values of gay and sado-masochistic sex. He claimed sado-masochistic sex was 'a kind of creation, a creative enterprise' in which participants invented new selves by exploring 'new possibilities of pleasure'. He eventually died of AIDS, which his lover said he saw as one of these 'limit expe-

***Without the evangelical revival that Britain and America experienced in the 18th and 19th centuries, both France and Germany were open to spiritual attack***

riences'. And Foucault had a great influence on the late 20th century and still influences thinking about homosexuality, which in the world (and the church) is both the focus and the symptom of wider issues, as we have seen.

The widest issue, of course, is that of submission to, or rejection of, almighty God. So what are Christians to do? We are to pray and evangelize, and where possible have our say in public life. As we do all that we must not teach (and think) about sin and salvation in a vacuum but in the context of God's moral holiness, his sovereignty, his providence and his creative purposes, with Jesus still his agent in creation (Col 1.17). It is these aspects of God's character that relate to his natural (or primary) law and those God given rights that flow from it. And we must always remember that being our loving creator his will and his plan and so his law is good, for us and for all. It is foolish to disobey.

# Come, Lord Jesus

*This is the sermon I preached on my last Sunday evening at Claypath Church, Durham. It was the final one in a series on Revelation, but it can stand on its own and also sums up the convictions which underlay my ministry in Durham and will continue to do so in Edinburgh.*

## **The reading is Revelation 21: 22-22:21**

A group of American students, frustrated by their struggle to understand the book of Revelation, went to the gym to play basketball. After their game they noticed that the old caretaker was sitting in the corner reading. 'What are you reading, Jo?' they asked. 'The book of Revelation', he replied. 'Oh, you can't understand that'. 'Yes', Joe replied, 'it's quite simple, Jesus wins'.

There is a profound truth here. We have grappled with many mysteries in this book and we cannot pretend to have done more than glimpse a little of its treasures, yet we must never lose sight of this basic truth – Jesus wins. The Son of Man has the keys of Death and Hades, he walks among the churches, he has opened the scroll of

human history, he is coming in the clouds and every eye shall see him.

These words are the culmination of the book and of the Bible. Genesis 1 and 2 and Revelation 21 and 22 form the bookends of the Bible and the first creation and the new creation. In between the Lord Christ met the serpent/dragon of Genesis 3 and in mortal battle gave him a blow from which he could never recover. But there is far more than repetition. The keynote is 21:5 'He who was seated on the throne said, See I am making everything new'. As we face change, we look forwards and upwards.

Here we have the climax of the fourth and last vision (these give us the underlying structure of the book; four times we read 'in the spirit': 1: 10; 4: 2; 17: 3 and 21: 10). Here God and the Lamb reign; God is God and the world will know it. The final words 22:7-21 form an epilogue which corresponds to the prologue 1:1-8. Here we have vision and practicality, doctrine and behaviour, theology and ministry.

## **Three great realities unfold in these words**

### **God is with us (21:2- 22:5)**

This is the message which runs through the Bible. In Genesis 3 God walks in Eden to meet and talk to his children; in the Exodus story he comes down to the tent in the desert; in the monarchy in the Temple and finally when Christ 'pitches his tent among us' (John 1:14) Here again we have Eden with the tree of life and the flowing river, but this is Eden beyond the curse (22:3).

But what does it mean to have God with us?

First we have the full light of God's presence 'The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it'. This is not necessarily astronomical information. When I was a little boy I did not want to go to heaven because 'the sea was no more'. But that is to misunderstand the nature of Biblical imagery. The sea is the haunt of Leviathan and he is now vanquished. The full light of God in the world to come suggests that we shall see the new creation in all its beauty as God sees it. Similarly the fact that there is no temple (21:22) is not a contradiction of

Ezekiel's vision (chs 40-48) where he sees the new Jerusalem mainly in terms of temple. Ezekiel had hoped to be a priest and his vision, before the Cross and resurrection, was a rebuilt city with a temple. His dreams were to be fulfilled in a way he could never have imagined.

The passage is rich and cannot be understood in crudely literalistic terms. The Holy City is not an entity in the new heaven and earth but another way of describing that same reality. Similarly the city both includes the new creation by whose light the nation walk and into which they bring their treasures. These verses (21:25-26) suggest that all which has been good, eg. in culture, art, music and literature, will find a place in the heavenly country. This is utter reality; we are 'further up and further in', the 'deeper country' of Narnia.

Then it is a country where God is truly at the centre. This is God the Trinity. The Lord God Almighty, the Creator and Lord of history is there. There too is the Lamb who died and rose again and who will come to wind up history. There is the Spirit, the life-giving river flowing from the throne, the river of Eden, of Psalm 46, of Ezekiel's vision, the river which Jesus identifies in John 7: 39 as the Spirit. This is a God who kept us in the past, keeps us now, and will keep us for ever.

And we shall see him (22:4). As against the mark of the Beast, the name of God will identify us as his people. In one sense this is terrifying; John himself had fallen as though dead at his feet (1: 17). Yet it is also the fulfilment of our true humanity. This is the emphasis of 1 John 1:2 – 'when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'. When we see him our transformation into his likeness will mean that we are what God created us to be. This is because of his death and resurrection. As one of the best of our Christmas hymns puts it: 'And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love'. I remember an old Christian woman who died when I was young. My parents would sometimes take me to visit her. There was

nothing sentimental about her; she had lived her life in hard circumstances but her faith was strong. One of the crosses she had carried was blindness from birth. Someone made a comment once about the sadness of never seeing her family and friends. She replied – 'The first face I see will be Jesus'. There is the faith which overcomes the world. God is with us and one day we will see.

## ***belief in the inspiration of the Bible is not about a book but about the kind of God who gave it***

### **His Word is true**

This is the second great reality, and brings us to the Epilogue (22:6-21). In v.6 – 'The words are trustworthy and true' and again in v.18 are authenticated by Jesus himself. There is some doubt in the Epilogue about who exactly the speakers are but v.6 shows that whether angel, seer or written words, this is the Master's voice.

We see here the inextricable link of the Living and Written Word. Ultimately belief in the inspiration of the Bible is not about a book but about the kind of God who gave it. This is a book which is the living Word of God who speaks, who reveals himself in his Son, and which is understood by the guidance of the Spirit. This is a book which will infallibly lead us to Christ and will never deceive us about him.

These words are not to be added to or subtracted from (v.18-19). This applies particularly to the book of Revelation but by extension to the Bible itself for this is the culmination of the whole plot line of Scripture from creation to new creation centred on Christ who is the First and Last. This is why we need a whole Bible to present a whole Christ and to produce whole Christians.

And these words are life-changing. 'Keep the words of this book' (22:9). The rest of the chapter shows us that we do not keep the words by shutting them up in a glass case, but by proclaiming them and sharing them with others. 'The Spirit and the Bride say come' (v.16). The Spirit using the church calls others to 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (19:19). This is another version of the Great Commission. Those who hear and respond invite others. The 'thirsty' are

*we do not keep the words by shutting them up in a glass case, but by proclaiming them and sharing them with others*

those who see that this is basic necessity. As each comes they become part of the great multitude whom no-one can count before the throne of God and the Lamb.

#### Christ is coming

This is the third great reality and the Bible falls silent with the best yet to come. 'Surely I am coming soon' (v.20). As Christians met around the Lord's table, the ancient prayer 'Maranatha' expressed their conviction that the risen Lord was with them and that they were anticipating the final coming. Every Christian activity and service was 'until he comes'.

But 'I am coming soon' (v.6, 20) sound strange at the beginning of the third millenium. We are in 'the last days'; these began with the coming and the death and resurrection of Christ, and we remember that with God a thousand years are as one day. To say 'soon' emphasises the certainty of Christ's coming. This is not something tagged on at the end. The death and resurrection of Christ began an irreversible movement to the new heaven and the new earth. The more firmly we believe that one day Christ will return

to wind up the affairs of this world and usher in a better one the more urgent it is that we engage in the lawful and worthy activities until he comes.

Christ is the Alpha and Omega, and that means everything between these two points as well as the points themselves. This is expressed in another way in the wonderful mixed metaphor of v.16, 'I am the root and descendant of David' with its ideas of both origin and fulfillment.

A time of change lies before us and we need to trust in the one who makes everything new. At such a moment (and I think of the thriving student work, the vibrant Sunday evening services, the work and fellowship of Cranmer Hall) the great temptation is to wallow in nostalgia. Then I hear the voice of the one seated on the throne: 'See I am making everything new'.

It is easy to look back on disappointments: projects that came to nothing; initiatives which failed; hopes that were dashed. Then the temptation is to indulge in that most delicious kind of nostalgia, self-pity. Then the voice sounds again: 'See I am making everything new'.

As we look at the wider scene: the huge decline of Christian Britain; the growing secularisation of our society; the contempt of the liberal/humanist establishment, then the temptation is to feel we are on the losing side. Then again the voice speaks: 'See I am making everything new'.

God is with us; his word is trustworthy and Christ is coming. That is the faith that will sustain us until we see Christ face to face.

# Concerning

## William J U Philip, The Proclamation Trust

*I want to share some thoughts with you about preaching which have been occupying my mind recently. During a recent trip that Dick Lucas and I made to the United States (for a number of preaching conferences), something struck me, and it set me thinking about what we really mean in saying that The Proclamation Trust is devoted to the encouragement of biblical preaching. Let me explain.*

At one of the conferences, someone from a local college (a good one) had brought a bookstall with books appropriate for a conference on preaching. As I browsed this bookstall it struck me that here was a plethora of books on every aspect of what might be called the art or science of biblical preaching. There were books on effective preaching, power preaching, arresting preaching, anointed preaching, Christ-focused preaching, and every other aspect of preaching you could imagine. Many of them, if not all of them, were sound, orthodox, biblical and evangelical, and most of them are probably very helpful books. Nevertheless, as I looked at the books, and pondered these things subsequently, I could not help but feel some disquiet. A gentle ringing of alarm bells began in my mind.

Why should this be? Surely the fact that so many books are appearing on all aspects of preaching must indicate there is a greater appetite for preaching

among evangelicals, and we should be encouraged by this. As I reflected on this, however, I began to realise how careful we need to be lest our enemy should take us unawares. The devil is very clever and very subtle, and the truth is that he is more likely to attack us where we think are strong, than where we know we are weak. In the latter things we are often more on our guard and ready to rebuff him; all too often, though, we are found to have trusted our own strengths far more than we ought to. Does Satan really think his best chance of doing damage to gospel preaching among evangelicals is by seeking to turn us away from preaching by blatant means, such as intimidation and ridicule? (Those of us really committed to biblical preaching are alert to this, and we are able to stand together, encouraging one another to resist with strength.) Or could it be that he considers it a better strategy to seduce us away from the power of true biblical proclamation, paradoxically, by actually focusing our attention and energies on preaching more and more?

That may sound a very odd thing to suggest. But we know that often the most effective way the devil gains a hold is not through out-and-out denial, which is easy to discern and refute, but through surreptitious perversion and distortion of the truth. This

may be much more difficult to see, and indeed may masquerade as the genuine article for a long time, so that by the time the real truth is discerned, the damage has been done. The devil loves to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). What could be a better and more satisfying tactic for him, then, than gradually to lure away keen evangelicals committed to expository preaching of the Scriptures, while at the same time making them think that they are really focusing more and more upon preaching, and becoming more committed to the task they believe in? The more I think about this, the more I am convinced there are dangers here that those of us committed to expository preaching need to be aware of, lest we should find ourselves being outwitted by these subtle schemes of our enemy.

### SUBTLE SHIFTS OF FOCUS IN WORD MINISTRY

So how could a zealous focus on expository preaching ministry actually lead us astray? I think there are at least three areas where subtle, and at first perhaps imperceptible, shifts can take place in our thinking, whereby, unless we are careful, we may find ourselves

# Preaching

on a diverging course from healthy, vital, biblical ministry.

## 1. A shift from content to form

First, there is the danger that the focus moves gradually from the *content* onto the *form* of the preaching itself. This may not be blatant, and at first may be quite inconspicuous; indeed, the danger lies in the very fact that it seems to be a wholesome and welcome development. We work hard on our preaching, and we seek to develop the craft of giving better sermons for our people – in terms of handling the text, using helpful structures, finding the right language and so on – and all of this is of course very good, in and of itself. But the danger is that because we are still sinful people, we are constantly (albeit often unconsciously) caught in drift that seeks to re-orientate our focus away from the Divine and onto the human. As we develop as preachers, the natural tendency is for the emphasis to move away from the text itself and onto us as the preacher, and to drift away from God himself onto what we are doing with the text in the sermon. As we become familiar with handling the Scripture responsibly we can all too easily begin to focus more on that ‘correct handling’ than on the Scripture itself that is being handled. We can inadvertently find ourselves stepping back from the text, or stepping above

the text, talking a lot *about* ministry, *about* the gospel, and *about* the text before us, rather than actually spending our time *in* the text – and so in the gospel – opening it up, unwrapping it, expounding its meaning, and showing it in all its fullness and richness so that it can be taken in by the hearer, not as the words of man, but as it really is, the Word of God.

Is there some evidence of this in the way that some of us seem to relish discussing whether this preacher or that is really a ‘proper’ expositor? More often than not the criteria used to make these judgements are actually to do much more with form than the content of the preaching. For some it may be a particular structure: introduction and points, a measured tone and a calm delivery; for others the ‘right’ criteria may be a ‘free’ structure, different inflection and an (apparently) more vivacious delivery. The same is true when we look for a particular ‘shape’ to the preaching: the criteria being conformity to a particular cherished framework (or ‘big picture’) of systematic or biblical theology. Now do not misunderstand me. These matters are very important; but it is precisely because as evangelical preachers we do take all these things seriously that we must be careful we are not eventually carried away by them from the heart of the matter. For it is the content of our

preaching – the *Scriptures themselves* – where the focus must always be.

## Lessons from history

When we turn to church history, it is chilling to observe this very pattern of drift from content to form being played out. The time of the Reformation was marked by a rediscovery of the Scriptures themselves, which had long since been locked up in a language of the academics and the clergy, and kept out of the reach of ordinary people. The result was an enormous renewed outpouring of expository preaching, with quite dramatic results. One reads, for example, of Ulrich Zwingli starting to minister in the great Minster in Zurich just as the Reformation was beginning in 1519. That huge building was crammed, day after day, week after week, as he started preaching through the Gospel of Matthew, verse by verse, for a whole year. Throughout the continent of Europe during the 16th century the emphasis was the same: all on the content of the preaching, the message of the Scriptures, rather than on the vehicle, the preaching process. However, it must be said that following the period of the Reformation, by the end of the 17th century and into the early 18th century, the attention had moved much more towards the vehicle of preaching itself. There was an

increasing emphasis on the 'science' and 'art' of preaching, and little by little the simple homiletic style of the Reformers became lost. Preaching took on more and more of a developed sermonic style, so much so that one historian notes that during the course of the 17th century the sermon became 'almost a province of literature, in so far as *conformity to prevailing literary standards* was required also from the preacher'.<sup>1</sup>

A good case can be made that it was to a very great extent this increasing interest in the form and style of preaching – all of which *initially* gained momentum through a desire to expound the Scriptures themselves – that led, ultimately, to the formal and arid intellectualism of the later Puritan period, and to the eventual obscuring of the biblical message altogether, the great gospel of the kingdom of God becoming buried in the moralism and liberalism of the late 18th and 19th centuries.

#### **Constant rediscovery of the Scriptures themselves**

During the latter part of the 20th century there was in this country a great rediscovery of the Word of God, and a renewed confidence in that Word proclaimed in preaching. The ministries we share in are the fruits of this, for which we thank God.

We must beware of being beguiled. The lessons of history tell us that what we need to do most of all is keep reminding ourselves that our business is, in fact, the *constant rediscovery* of the Word of God itself, much more than it is a constant focus on the mechanics of the practice of preaching. There is an analogy with the work of the Holy Spirit here. We cannot know Christ apart from the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit is all important therefore; but the evidence of the true work of the Spirit is that all the focus is on Jesus Christ. Just so, we cannot know and discover the Word of God in Scripture without preaching, and preaching is a *sine qua non* ('how can they hear without a preacher?' Rom. 10:14); but the

## ***hermeneutics and homiletics, though important, do not work miracles; but the Word of God does***

evidence of a true and right attitude to preaching is that all the focus is on the Scriptures and the living Word, not on the mechanics of the preaching as a vehicle of that Word.

To put it another way: hermeneutics and homiletics, though important, do not work miracles; but the Word of God does. It is no accident that in describing their life-transforming experience on the Road to Emmaus, the two hitherto dejected and dispirited disciples testified 'did not our hearts burn within us while ... *he opened to us the Scriptures*' (Luke 24:32). Surely this must have been the most exegetically perfect, theologically coherent, Christologically focussed preaching from the Old Testament on the death and resurrection of Jesus that ever there was! But their response looks straight through the 'preaching' as such, as though it were transparent. All the focus is on the message itself, the living Word, the 'opened Scriptures', because it is this, and this alone, that causes hearts to burn, to change, to come alive with the glorious hope of the gospel. Was this not John Wesley's experience, in the famous meeting in Aldersgate in 1738? Of the 'preaching' he heard that night he records only that 'one was reading Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to Romans*'. So it was a second hand sermon, and a read sermon – a double anathema to some! – and (significantly?) an anonymous, forgotten preacher. But what he heard, as he listened to Luther's exposition of Romans, was the Scripture 'opened to him' so that his heart, too, burned within him, 'strangely warmed' by the Word of life. The fruit of that transformation was, as we all know, quite incalculable.

### **2. A shift from vertical to horizontal**

A second subtle change that can gradually creep in, at first perhaps unconsciously, among those of us who are



*we too easily begin to think of Bible  
'teaching' and 'learning' as merely mutual  
edification along the horizontal axis, and  
forget the vertical axis*

committed to expository Word ministry is a shift from the *vertical* to the merely *horizontal* in terms of our understanding of what is actually happening as we open up the Scriptures. That is, we too easily begin to think of Bible 'teaching' and 'learning' as merely mutual edification along the horizontal axis, and forget the vertical axis. We forget the presence of the living God himself, whose Word is not just being heard as if from a distance, but who is himself present by his Spirit, and breathing out his living Word as the Scriptures are opened up today.

If this were not true, then preaching would be no different from mere lecturing, teaching, arguing or reasoning. I say mere, because true preaching does of course aim to teach, inform, reason, admonish, rebuke and so on. But it is also much more than this. It is different from any other kind of communication that exists in this world, because its origin is beyond this world. It is revelation from God, and further, it is revelation *of* God. If this were not true, we would have to concede that men and women could be brought to the new birth as believers through a mere intellectual process, involving learning a series of doctrinal formulations and propositional truths, because people *are* converted to Christ precisely through what appears to be a process just like this. As they hear and understand the message of the gospel through the Bible they are learning and receiving propositional truth; but *through* that – in a way which we can only describe as a miraculous breaking-in of the life of the world to come into their present earthly existence – they are being brought into a real and vital relationship with the living God. A miracle takes place; as the Scriptures are opened up to them, so they encounter

the Christ of the Scriptures.

**Creating and sustaining a living  
relationship**

Do not think I am somehow emphasising experience and down-playing the place of the mind. Far from it! Of course the message of the gospel is first to the mind, for it is through the renewal of our minds that the darkness of our godless thinking is transformed, and we are brought to see the light of reality in Christ. But Scripture has an end in view for us; it is designed to bring us, by that very ongoing transformation, into a living *relationship* of union with Christ, into the state of *knowing* God through Christ (not just knowing about him). That is the purpose of biblical preaching and teaching – to create this relationship, and then to sustain and nurture believers within it, to feed them with the bread of life, and to nourish them at the table of their beloved.

We know this in theory, which is why we are committed to expository Word ministry. But precisely *because* we are convinced of the primacy of teaching in the pastoral task, and because we want to devote time and effort to our preparation and teaching, there is always the danger that we begin to forget that the very purpose of the revelation of God in Scripture is relational in this way. We so easily focus on 'the teaching ministry' that we forget the whole purpose of that ministry is to be a vehicle of a love relationship, between Christ and his people. The very essence of this ministry has a vertical dimension: the triune God is, through his Word, revealing himself to us, and asking us to respond to him in love and obedience in every part of our beings. We really do *meet* God in his Word.

**To know and to love God**

God gave the Scriptures, and preserved them for us, that we may know not merely things about him, but that we may *know him*. If we lose this vertical dimension, we are really pushing the person of Christ out of the gospel. We are forgetting that ultimately what we

need is more than just knowledge *about* God – even sound, biblical, expository teaching about God – it is *God himself*. We are also forgetting that all the initiative in the Word comes from God alone. We do not stand over the Scriptures because we are ‘Bible Teachers’; nor do we dictate the agenda and goal of our ministry. We must do the hard work and all the necessary study, of course; but not so that we can master the Word, merely to know ‘what it is about’ and so pass ‘it’ on and find satisfaction in ‘well-taught’ congregations. God is the author and the master of his Word; we are only the servants who carry his message of life and power, and we do so for the purpose he has ordained. His purpose is not merely that believers be well-taught; he wants them to be so in order that they may know that they are well loved, and that they may rejoice in his love, respond to it, live in it, and so overflow with this love both one to another and to a world that as yet does not know him. We are servants of this message, ambassadors of a ‘vertical’ Word from a God who speaks today.

### 3. A shift from the corporate to the individual

A third danger we must beware of is a shift in focus from the corporate to the individual. In essence, of course, this is just another expression of the general drift from a God-centred, Kingdom-oriented mentality to the man-centred, self-preoccupation that is the hallmark of our natural condition, and to which we constantly naturally regress if left unchecked by the correction of God’s Word.

#### Where is the power in preaching?

It is in large measure this individual rather than corporate focus which causes us a great deal of confusion when we try to articulate what it is that makes the proclamation of the Word of God different from other means of communication. In particular, we struggle to define where it is that the ‘power’ in preaching resides, and just how it is that this is made manifest in the preaching. But because we focus so

much on the individual, we often find ourselves trying to explain this in terms of the preacher alone, and so get into all kinds of difficulties.

For some, the explanation is articulated wholly in terms of a rather indefinable ‘something extra’ that rests on the preacher, a special unction or anointing possessed by the man, without which ‘real’ preaching cannot take place. Others recoil from what appears to be unhelpfully mystical language, and reject all such exalted descriptions of preaching. Rather, they insist the preacher’s ‘gifts’ reside merely in the learned technical ability to ‘rightly handle’ the Scriptures, and in hard work, adequate time set aside for preparation, and clear presentation.

Both points of view are trying to articulate something profoundly true about the biblical concept of preaching, but each is inadequate on its own. The former description wants to preserve the Divine involvement in gospel proclamation, and to emphasise, quite rightly, that it is indeed God who is speaking, and this only because of the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit. The danger, however, where this emphasis predominates, is that in a quite unwarranted way the preacher

## *The aura of the sacrosanct around the pulpit has done nothing to ennoble the Word of God*

himself may become elevated into a rarefied category of his own. His oracular pronouncements are deemed sacred and untouchable, beyond any criticism, and thus he is beyond the (often much needed) help and improvement that could be gained through mutual interaction with discerning brothers and sisters in the fellowship. I have been in churches where fine and able evangelical ministers are clearly failing to attain their potential as preachers precisely for this reason. The aura of the sacrosanct around the pulpit has done nothing to ennoble the Word of God; instead it has simply become a barrier to the pastor’s (and

congregation's) development. This is not evidence of high spirituality, but of tragedy.

The latter view, on the other hand, rightly insists that there is a clear and vital element of human responsibility in preaching. We hear God's voice as and when his written Word in Scripture is faithfully taught, and this happens when the Bible teacher takes study of the text in context seriously, and learns the disciplines of responsible exposition. The danger here, though, is a tendency to mechanise the whole process of preaching, believing that once one has learned the 'knack' of the proper expository method, and so long as one 'does the time' in the study, and clearly teaches the Bible to the people, 'the Word will do the work' with guaranteed results. This comes perilously close to ignoring the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit altogether, or at least imagining he will always have to dance to our tune just so long as we 'get the exposition right'. But we are gravely mistaken to think we can so command and control the Lord of Hosts in this way. Neither doctrinal orthodoxy nor faultless methodology guarantees spiritual life. I fear there are evangelical

they do (in terms of *their* preaching). In the New Testament however, the focus is entirely different. It is not on the individual in this way, but on the corporate: not on the Word gifts themselves, but on the sphere of *service* of these gifts – the *whole church* – and on the purpose of the gifts, that the *one body*, 'joined and held together' as it is in Christ, might grow into full maturity in Christ (Eph. 4:1–16). The preacher, therefore, can never be thought of as a 'gifted Bible teacher' *in vacuo*; he is 'given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' and 'so that the church may be built up' (1 Cor 12:7; 14:4,5).

This is what explains the simple fact which we as preachers all know to be true: we gain immensely more insight into the Word of God when we study it in order to teach, than when we do so merely for ourselves. It has nothing to do with the fact that we may be expending more time and concentration on our study (which may or may not always be the case!) Our shelves are full of books by scholars (including evangelicals) who have spent decades immersed in study, and yet far too many still seem to have gained precious little insight that is of life-giving use to the church. No, the reason that as the preacher in his study meditates and reflects upon the Scriptures the Lord himself gives him such insights (c.f. 2 Tim 2:7), is because we are there doing it *for the people of God*, not just for ourselves! The Word of God is *for* the church of God, and the teaching gifts of the preacher are for the service of the church as a whole. It is never an individual matter, always a corporate one. This is basic to the whole understanding of ecclesiology in the New Testament.

## ***Neither doctrinal orthodoxy nor faultless methodology guarantees spiritual life***

congregations – and preachers – becoming quietly desiccated, their spiritual life-blood draining away, because (albeit unwittingly) the Holy Spirit of God is being grieved away.

### **The church: God's power among his people**

Much of the reason that we become tangled up in this way is precisely because of a failure to consider the overwhelmingly corporate context in which the Bible deals with these matters. We are focussing on the individual, the preacher – on what they possess (in terms of gifting and learning) and what

### **The power of the Holy Spirit's presence**

When we take seriously the biblical emphasis on the corporate context for the exercise of teaching gifts, the difficulty we have in giving full weight to both the divine and the human aspects of the preaching task can be resolved

much more easily. Take first the place of the Holy Spirit. Is there really something 'extra' happening when the Word is proclaimed by the preacher? Yes indeed! Something very special – indeed miraculous – is happening. We need not hesitate to say this out of fear of enduing the preacher with some mystical power, for the focus is not on him as an individual, but on the congregation as a whole. David Peterson puts it very helpfully: 'The *congregation* is where the sacred presence of God is to be found'<sup>3</sup>. When the church is thus assembled 'the power of our Lord Jesus is present' (1 Cor 5:4), and as the Word is ministered, 'God presences himself in a distinctive way in the Christian meeting through his word and the operation of the Spirit.'<sup>4</sup> Paul's point in 1 Cor 14:23–25 is precisely that he expects God himself to be encountered by believers – and also by unbelievers<sup>5</sup> – when the church gathers for the mutual edification that comes through the word preached. The preacher is not doing something miraculous; he is simply expounding the Scriptures. But God is doing something miraculous for his people through the preaching as they gather around his Word so expounded. 'Through the exercise of gifts and ministries, the exalted Christ manifests his presence and encourages and nurtures the faith of his flock.'<sup>6</sup>

#### The struggles of the preacher

What then of the preacher's task? Is the need for the hard work – the study, the right handling of the text, the constant effort to find 'just the right words' so as to impart knowledge to the people – somehow diminished because of this focus on the powerful sovereign presence of God himself? Indeed not! Is the imperative of the great commission

to go and make disciples of all nations in any way diminished by Scripture's clear assertion of the sovereignty of God in election? No! Likewise, the command to the pastor teacher to 'be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman' (2 Tim 2:15) is not eclipsed, but rather reinforced and intensified, precisely because of this great expectation of the powerful and personal working of the Holy Spirit which attends gospel proclamation. The preacher's motivation is similarly elevated; he is not merely to expect that men and women will 'learn the Bible' but that they will, together, through the diligent ministry of the Word, participate in a miraculous encounter with the living God himself, and hear him speak in their midst. Ought not this wonderful prospect to encourage the embattled pastor in his study? If this is really true, will he not also echo Paul's words, 'for this I toil, struggling with all *his* energy that he powerfully works in *me*' (Col 1:29)? His extraordinary privilege is to play his part, *for the sake of the church*, in what is ultimately the work of God himself among his people.

#### The participation of the whole body

A proper corporate focus also liberates us from the wholly mistaken notion that the rest of the congregation are passive in the process of the preaching, merely recipients of Bible teaching, accruing knowledge and information, but not otherwise involved. We can see that nothing could be further from the truth if we consider what is happening in terms of such a real encounter and engagement with God. Together we draw near to God, as he draws near to us through the means of his Word.

We should not miss this vital connection – corporate meeting together, and God speaking in the midst. There is a current fashion around for refusing to call congregational gatherings 'Services' or 'Worship' in any sense, and an increasing preference for describing these as simply 'meetings'. There may be good and valid reason for this, as a

***A proper corporate focus also liberates us from the wholly mistaken notion that the rest of the congregation are passive in the process of the preaching***

reaction against the near obsession with 'worship' (often meaning merely endless repetitive singing) of so much of present-day evangelicalism. I would not want to quibble about ecclesiastical nomenclature (though it does make us sound more like Quakers than orthodox evangelicals). But just a warning: it is very easy for reaction to lurch into over-reaction. If by insisting on 'meeting' we mean nothing more than believers meeting together, we part company altogether with the New Testament understanding of the nature and purpose of such gatherings. Once again, we have erased the vertical dimension, and lost the overwhelming focus on God himself. As Hebrews makes clear, meeting *one another* is not an end in itself. The goal is always meeting with one another in order to draw near to meet with *God himself*.

As we meet together with believers here on earth, around his Word, we really do meet together with our Saviour, our great High Priest. We call on him, and he answers us. We hear his voice; we know his presence. He draws near to us as we draw near to him (James 4:8). 'There am I in the midst' (Matt. 18:20).

#### **The prayers of the saints**

Just as the teacher's struggle in the work of preaching is not nullified by the work of God in the midst, so also the whole people of God have work to do. The corporate context of preaching emphasises the corporate responsibility for prayer. God's promise is that he will be a hearing God who speaks to answer his people's request. 'Call to me and I will answer you', 'ask and it will be given to you; seek and you shall find'. This great simplicity lies at the very heart of true biblical faith: 'You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire he is God' (1Kings 18:24). The prayers of the saints, rising up before the throne of God, are still what brings down the fire of God on behalf of his people (Rev 8:4-5). The Lord is a God who hears, and speaks in answer, in words of grace and power.

The sovereign God is not controlled by our prayers, but in his abundant grace he seems pleased to accommodate himself to them. When we seek his voice, we shall hear it. This is why in the New Testament prayer, and especially corporate prayer<sup>7</sup>, is so intimately linked to the ministry of the Word as to be inseparable from it. The ESV rendering of Ephesians 6:17-18 makes this exceptionally clear: 'take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, *praying* at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.' You see the logic: the sword, the word of God which is living and active, able to pierce the soul and spirit, to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12ff), is wielded and put to work *through prayer*. The prayer in view is the corporate prayer of the whole church in that one place, for the worldwide church ('all the saints'), and focussed on the proclamation of the word of God by the preacher in particular situations ('that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel'). This means we must recognise that the pray-ers are as important as the preachers. It is not within the power of the preacher alone to preach with power; all his efforts alone (including his own prayers) cannot wield the sword of the Spirit. There must be the prayers of the saints. I wonder if we take this nearly as seriously as the New Testament does?

#### **God's work and our work**

If all this is so, then there is a three-way 'partnership' in effective gospel proclamation. The preacher is involved, struggling in his own weakness faithfully to discharge the task of teaching the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15, Col 1:29

***The sovereign God is not controlled by our prayers, but in his abundant grace he seems pleased to accommodate himself to them***

etc.). Those wrestling in prayer have a vital part, crying out together in the presence of the listening God. Their prayers focus on the preaching of the Word, seeking clear and bold proclamation, open doors, rapid spread of the message, and honourable reception of the word of the gospel by the hearers (Eph. 6: 19-20, Col 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1 etc.). And above all the Lord God himself is at work, his mighty Spirit moving in the midst as his voice is heard with power (1 Cor 2:4, 1 Thess. 1:5).

Again, Christian history is illuminating. While on holiday some time ago I happened to be reading (alongside some rather lighter titles!) a selection of historical accounts of the time of the Great Awakening, and some biographies of that period. I suppose I had expected extraordinary preaching to be one of the outstanding features of these times of true revival, and that the accounts would be full of such descriptions. Of course there were many great men of God at large in those days, and one cannot but be amazed by what the Lord accomplished through the ministries of Whitfield, Wesley and the likes. But what struck me, in reading of the happenings on both sides of the Atlantic – particularly in New England in the mid 1730s, and Cambuslang and Kilsyth,<sup>9</sup> where revival broke out in 1742 – was the distinct *lack* of any such marked focus on preachers, and preaching oratory, in so many places that were truly transformed by revival. Instead, what impressed me more than anything else was the widespread pre-occupation of churches with corporate prayer.

Societies for prayer sprang up everywhere. Their focus was never merely parochial, but overwhelmingly concentrated on mission, both local and international. This was real and tangible partnership in mission; ordinary folk felt wholly involved in gospel work all over the Old and New World. Nor was the prayer vague and non-specific; the special concern of these meetings was always prayer for gospel proclamation. A great transatlantic 'Concert for Prayer' was co-ordinated, with hundreds of meetings for prayer on

Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, these times purposely chosen as being nearest to 'the time of dispensing gospel ordinances throughout the Christian world'.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of this, many very ordinary preachers slogged away at their preparation, and climbed the pulpit steps to do their best. They were not free from the trials of pastoral life, but had the same struggles and opposition from within and without that we all face. One of the most astonishing things of all was to read how Jonathan Edwards himself was unceremoniously ejected as pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, just a few years following the revival (which just goes to show that revival, wonderful as it may be, is not the answer to every pastor's problems).

This reality mirrors what we find in the New Testament. Paul's ministry, as he recounts it to the Roman church, was full of evidence of the power of God at work. He glorified in the way God had led the Gentiles to the obedience of faith 'by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit' (Rom 15:19). But this had happened as he 'fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ', a preaching ministry of very real and continuous battles, in which he urged all the believers 'by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me' (15:30). The same pattern is everywhere evident in the New Testament, and nothing has changed in gospel ministry since. These three things go together: the power of God, the prayers of the saints, and the struggles of the preacher. Just as we must not forget the vertical element of preaching – God himself speaking – so we cannot ignore the corporate context. God speaks in answer to his people's prayers.

These preachers were just like us. Few were great orators; even Edwards is said to have preached in virtual monotone, a cushion under his elbow as he propped his head above the dense script, which he read word for word. But the focus was not on them, or their sermon; it was on God and his voice.

*we must be only 'a voice', our preaching always pointing beyond itself, to that living Word, never within to our own eloquence*

Because they rightly understood their work of preaching and prayer, and God's work of speaking with power in the midst, people gathered with great expectations of God. They eagerly anticipated his presence among them in power through his Word, put to work as it was, through prayer. They earnestly implored him to work similarly among their partners in mission at home and abroad. And the Lord did, with mighty effect.

## ARRESTING THE DRIFT

The human condition, even among those reborn, is marked by constant drift; we drift to the centre of our world, and God drifts to the periphery. In Christ we have received a new nature, but as long as we remain in the flesh the desires of the flesh wage war against us, and we drift. We need constant Divine correction, constant reorientation, by the grace of God in the gospel. This is true in our preaching, as it is in every area of our lives, and we must be humble enough to admit it. We must be alert, lest our enemy, the father of deceit and lies, should beguile us and our churches, by causing us to drift, gently unaware, in the very area where we believe our strength lies.

Let us determine to resist him. We shall do so if we consciously strive in our prayers, resolving not drift in any of these ways as far as our own ministry as pastor-teachers is concerned. Our focus must be a constant rediscovery of God's own self revelation in his Word, and our determination must be to think of ourselves only as servants of that Word, never its master. Like John the Baptist we must decrease, that the Word may increase; we must be only 'a voice', our preaching always pointing beyond itself, to that living Word, never within to our own eloquence. Moreover, the stress of our preaching must go beyond merely words about God, to the personal Word, to the reality of the God of the Word himself, and to the Christ who seeks, within an intimate relationship of faith union, to nourish believers whom he loved and

gave himself for on the cross at Calvary. And we must never forget that we are not in isolation in the task of preaching, neither can we ever be self-sufficient, or self-reliant. God may have given us gifts, yet they are not gifts for us, but for the church, and their exercise in ministry is part of the mutual ministry by the body, for the edification of the whole church. The congregation must play a full part. Our preaching is not just part of a corporate ministry, it is itself a corporate event, in which God hears and answers the cry of his people, and delights to presence himself among them in power.

### God at the centre

If our focus is right, then God will be at the centre; he will be pre-eminent in all things. Our eyes will be all upon him, his person and his glory; our ears open to his word of life-giving power, and our hearts open to his church, the bride of his Son, whom he gave himself up for, and is now gathering from the ends of the earth to be with him forever.

### Endnotes

- 1 W F Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory* (London, 1932), 46.
- 2 Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A practical theology of preaching*, (Leicester, 1996).
- 3 David Peterson, 'Worship in the New Testament', *Worship: Adoration and Action*, Ed D A Carson (Carlisle, 1993), 78 (italics his).
- 4 Peterson, *Worship*, 77.
- 5 This is a very important point: the implication is that unbelievers, even the rank outsider, totally ignorant of spiritual things (Gk *idiotes*) will be converted and begin to bow down and worship God in repentance and faith, in gatherings that are first and foremost taking place for the edification of believers through the exercise of the word gifts within the church. In other words 'teaching meetings' are not seeker unfriendly, but powerful unto salvation, because God himself is present, and may be encountered.
- 6 Peterson, *Worship*, 80 (italics mine).
- 7 It is worth noting that virtually every

request for prayer (and indeed virtually every command to pray) in the Epistles implies a context of corporate prayer. The loss of the distinction in modern English versions of singular and plural pronouns has tended to encourage our individualistic reading of the New Testament, whereas almost all the imperatives are directed not to the individual, but to the whole congregation.

- 8 I warmly recommend Arthur Fawcett's account, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh: BOT 1996), which has much wider scope than the title suggests, and gives a great insight into the real nationwide and transatlantic networks of fellowship in mission which marked the period surrounding the Great Awakening.
- 9 Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Vol. 2, 440-1.

This article is an edited version of a *PT Media Paper*, 'Concerning Preaching: Some thoughts on biblical preaching'. These and other PT Media resources are available at [www.proctrust.org.uk](http://www.proctrust.org.uk)

**William JU Philip is Director of Ministry at The Proclamation Trust**

### 3RD SCOTTISH MINISTRY ASSEMBLY, GLASGOW JUNE 2003

#### *'Whoever Wins Souls is Wise'*

Over 500 ministers and church leaders met for three days at St George's Tron for this biennial event.

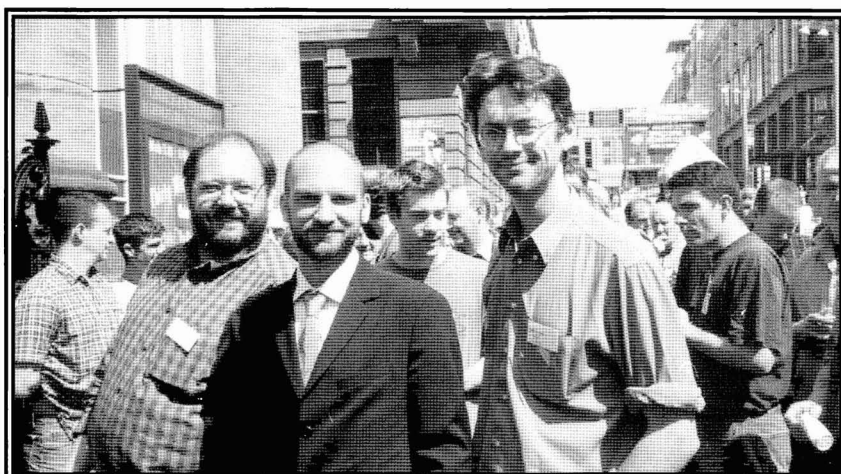
The ministry of the various speakers was appreciated, and we trust that God will use what was heard for his greater glory.



Coffee break in the Tron



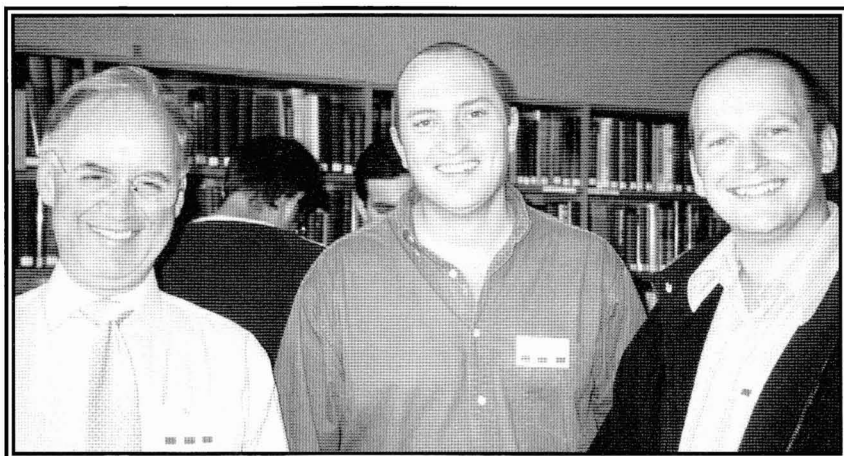
Ravi Zacharias and John Piper talking with Stuart McAllister



Some of the delegates on a coffee break outside the Tron



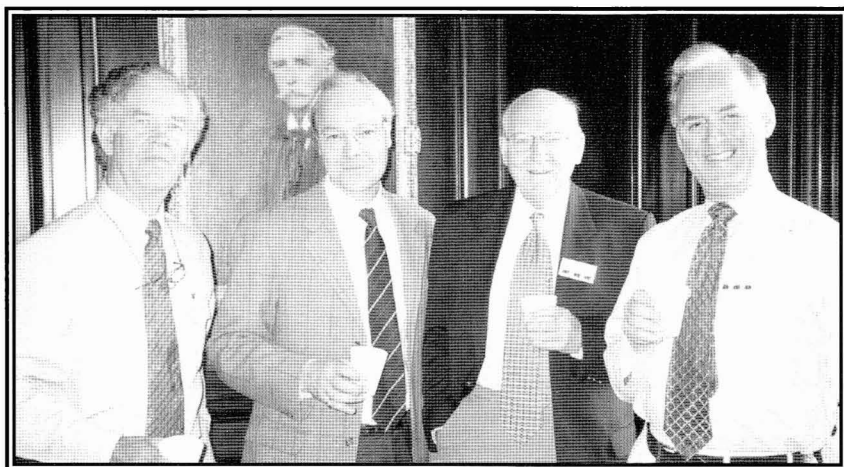
## 10TH EDINBURGH CONFERENCE IN CHRISTIAN DOGMATICS EDINBURGH AUGUST 2003



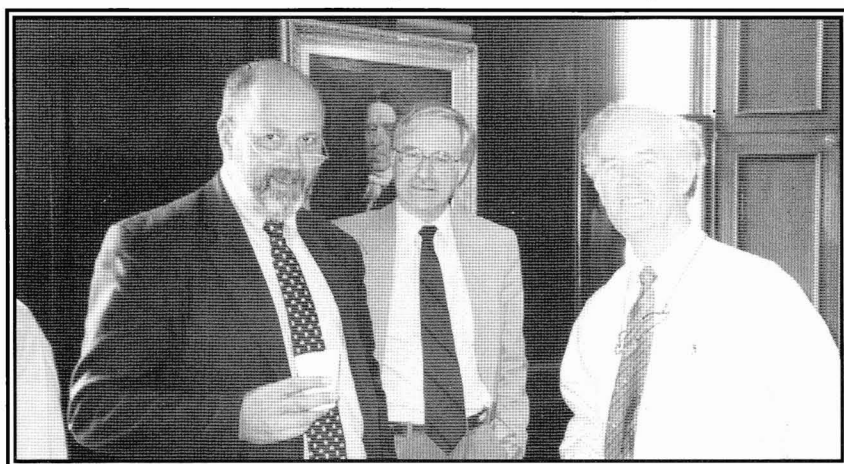
**Drs Bob Fyall, Mark Bonnington and Robin Parry**

### *'Justification'*

This conference, held in the Free Church College, was a stimulating occasion with over 80 attending and some quite outstanding papers and wide-ranging discussion. A highlight of the conference was a paper by Tom Wright, the new Bishop of Durham. The papers are to be published so watch this space!



**Left to right, Rev David Searle, Rt Rev Dr Iain Torrance, Prof. David Wright and Dr Bob Fyall**



**Rt Rev Dr Tom Wright with Dr Tom Noble and David Searle**



## Ann Allen meets Mike Parker

*If you are reading this journal then it is a fair assumption that you are 'an evangelical' in faith and by conviction. What exactly that means is different for different people, and unpacking that in a Scottish context is one of the many tasks confronting Mike Parker as he settles into his new role as General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in Scotland.*

**Ann: Mike, I think of you as an honorary Scot or an anglicised Scotsman, how did you come to devote yourself to ministry here rather than in England?**

Mike: We've been in Scotland for 15 years now. I'd been in industry but always felt a call to full-time ministry. I worked with UCCF where I met my wife Helen and then trained in Bristol and started in Leicester in an Anglican church. Then Dennis Lennon contacted us. He was Rector in St Thomas' Corstorphine and they had already planted St Pauls and St Georges. That was a work of revival rather than a new

plant. Apparently, so the story goes, at a famous AGM he told his people that if they lived east of Roseburn he wanted them to leave! A bold move! As a result some 70 members left, and, under the leadership of Roger Simpson, joined the 20 or so faithful members already at P's and G's. So the church that flourishes there today was revived. The next vision was for a second plant up on the hill in Clermiston to serve the west of Edinburgh. Eventually as they realised that housing scheme in suburbia is a very different animal from city centre, their specification for their leader altered and fitted us, so we took the hard decision to leave the known and take up the exciting challenge to build from scratch in Emmanuel in Clermiston. We found a group meeting in a primary school grown from an initial house group.

When Dennis Lennon surprised everyone by leaving to devote himself to evangelism in Sheffield, it was suggested that we move from the plant to the parent, and that committed us to a

much longer period in Scotland.

**Ann: That was, I imagine a small geographical shift but a huge shift in approach and in the gifts needed in ministry because St Thomas' is a long established congregation. What was your emphasis in ministry there, would you say?**

Mike: I sometimes think we spent a lot of time trying to make St Thomas' more like Emmanuel! I moved from a very flexible, very open-ended, very willing new congregation, eager to experiment, to a church with a very impressive history and some awesome predecessors casting very long shadows. In my view, after the two church plants, having given away about 100 of their people, who were the risk-takers, St Thomas' had radically changed. It was now no longer the church people commuted to. There was a growing number of evangelical anglican churches and others for people to attend, so there was a case for a thor-

ough review of who we were and what we were for. I think my time at St Thomas' will go down as a time of review and change and alteration as we became more clearly focused on the local scene and became more involved with other parish churches already working there, alongside preserving and expanding that breadth of interest which the congregation always had, city wide, nationally and internationally.

**Ann: The episcopal church in Scotland I would describe as being a small but strong presence. You tend to punch above your weight, if you see what I mean?**

Mike: The denomination is a complicated animal as far as evangelicals are concerned. We are small in size in Scotland so that gives some freedom to do what matters and relatively little ecclesiastical clutter to worry about! There are now many more small clusters of evangelical, episcopal churches, in Edinburgh fostered amazingly by the previous Bishop, in Aberdeen, and then a scatter of them elsewhere. It still likes to present itself today as the free thinking group between the equal horrors of catholicism and presbyterianism! It is a mixed church which in my view cannot resist toying with novelty. The issues of women bishops and sexuality have us on our toes just now as evangelicals, wondering just how this will go. It was Scottish episcopalians who launched the American denomination and there would be an attraction to identify with the American style of church for Scottish episcopalians. We are set up as a denomination to be a *Communion* rather than a *Federation* which means that there is presently no right to the freedoms being claimed by Americans and Canadians to do things their own way. That will be one of the issues that will have to be grappled with at the Primates meeting. What kind of church are we now?

**Ann: How did you deal with the call to this new area of ministry in E.A. which hauls you out of the parish scene dramatically and gives you this national remit, when obviously you were being blessed and seeing things move in the congregation?**

Mike: I think if I had been an external consultant looking at St Thomas' I would have said that there needs to be change, and that would involve me. I had had a longer ministry, 12 years, than any of my predecessors, a heroically long time. I found myself hearing what wise counsellors were telling me as this post had become available. But crucially, when I was steadily running away from the prospect, I recognised that I trusted the judgement of those who were calling me to reconsider, and finally faced the wrench and the risk. Ironically I'd been preaching on the need to take risks and it was as if the Lord spoke to me and challenged me to do just that myself.

**Ann: What do you miss most about parish ministry?**

Mike: It has not been an easy transition and I miss the regular things hugely. For some months I did not know how to begin a sermon because I didn't know how to connect. I think I now have my courage back but it has taken some time. One suggestion someone made was that instead of taking a portable sermon round as so many travellers do, that I should do my own exposition week by week consistently in different locations. The pastoral links with the people are greatly missed although we have been warmly welcomed by churches in Liberton where we are now based.

**Ann: The experience you have had in two very different church settings is bound to help you enormously as you begin to measure and shape the task of leading EA in Scotland.**

Mike: My parish experience is help-

ing me to ask the question constantly 'What does this look like locally?' People will ask the question 'Why should we do this here?' and without grassroots experience I would not be able with integrity to answer them. My purpose and that of the Alliance team is to serve the churches.

**Ann: Do you have the freedom to develop the pattern of EA in Scotland or are you locked into a UK mould?**

Mike: EA is unashamedly a UK-based and UK-serving group. I'm reminded of the Ronseal advert which proclaims 'It does exactly what it says on the tin'. And EA does that, exactly what it says on the tin, it is an *alliance* of those of us who are *evangelicals* and our instinct has been to remain united rather than fragment into regions or countries. I am free within that commitment to develop what seems appropriate in Scotland. I am hurtling round greeting people for the first time. Always I am asking, 'where's the group?', 'where are people meeting, praying, working together here for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of this community?'. As evangelical churches particularly where is that going on? I want to see where that is not happening, where it is happening I want to see what shape it takes. We are free to respond to that and work alongside that.

**Ann: You also have a real profile as a group within political circles through Jeremy Balfour the Parliamentary officer.**

Mike: We are seeking to engage publicly in the political process, with the Scottish Parliament, the decision-makers, alongside our friends in CARE. But we also want to expand that because it is not the sole responsibility of folk like Jeremy and myself to do that. We need to help churches do the engaging for themselves and we are working out how to do that. It's a bit like a church having a long-term commitment to youth work and continually employing a Youth worker. That's fine as far as it goes but do we let it change the church? We

still have someone doing the youth work for us...we haven't really taken up the work as a church. I think that is one of the challenges, certainly on the political scene. I have always taken the view that by-and-large God provides every church with what they need to be the church in that place at that time, therefore we do not need to lose sleep that we don't have the right kind of worship leader or whatever. The challenge is 'What can be authentic here with these people?' Local churches are very much the frontline but they also need friends across the spectrum and that is where EA has a major role to play. Networking, Resourcing and Voice are the three catch words which summarise the support EA gives across the nation at a local level.

**Ann: How does that work out in practical terms?**

Mike: In terms of what is called a 'matrix ministry'.....no one church can tackle a city centre on its own, you don't tackle an area of asylum seekers on your own; you don't tackle a run down housing scheme on your own, but you can tackle it in some kind of a matrix. As far as I have observed there is in Scotland an increasing willingness to work together in ministry, and break down the protective approaches to ministry that have persisted.

**Ann: Is this happening at grass-roots only?**

Mike: I am encouraged by different denominations recognising that we don't act alone any more. Now evangelicals are a fragmented bunch, and we can be a competitive bunch, and so obviously there has to be a significant role for an alliance of evangelicals.

**Ann: So Mike, if I was a sceptic what would you say to encourage me to join EA.**

Mike: In Ephesians we are called to maintain the unity of the spirit. Two things are immediately striking about the history of the Alliance. The first is

how many Scots were involved in the original forming of the Alliance away back in the 1840's because they recognised, biblically speaking, that there was a place for expressing unity rather than just assuming it. And secondly of course history proves just how difficult it is to maintain the unity of the spirit among evangelicals. It is very hard work. I do believe if Ephesians is right it is achievable. In Scotland we are small enough to honour, respect and work with one another. I would ask the prayers of readers as we seek to help make that happen.

**Ann: There is often such a caricature of evangelicalism abroad Mike...how would you simply define it for us.**

Mike: I would want us to be Christ-centred, cross-centred and bible-based people who do not just assume the bible but let it shape us, revisiting it and grappling with it so that we encourage a thorough evangelicalism which can stand up to scrutiny allowing new light to break from God's word.

**Ann: If we were to have another conversation in say 8 years, Mike, what would you like to be able to describe as having been helped in that time by the work of EA?**

Mike: I'd like to see in each area of Scotland networks of Churches. They might be evangelical alliances or fellowships which relate to one another, honour and respect one another and keep praying and working on evangelistic initiatives that are better done together than individually... that would be the first strand of what I'd like to see. Then I'd like to see an evangelical perspective on Scottish life at least heard, honoured and respected would be too much to ask, but at least heard in Scottish media and decision making processes. I think if those things began to happen then I would feel we'd built on the very good foundation that David Anderson began. I've inherited something called REMIT, Resourcing Mission Together and the genus of that

is that it asks groups of churches what they might consider doing together, and offers consultancy to help, in practical ways and in training.

**Ann: What do you think are going to be the major hurdles to seeing that begin to happen, for there is reluctance to giving up personal preserves.**

Mike: I already see evidences that people are well ahead in some of these areas. Sadly where churches are more biblical I tend to see less of that. Sometimes it is in response to decline where people realise they need help and that is well documented. One of the most significant verses in my experience is that statement of Jesus that much will be required of those to whom much has been given. I feel that applies to churches as well as to individuals. Personally I feel the Lord has given me so much and so much is required of me. I would like to use the 'already there' churches as models for those who don't know where to start. Sometimes the best I think we can hope for is permission from those who don't want to do it to get on with it anyway.

**Ann: Presbyterianism is supposed to present those of us in that system with a useful alliance but although it should be a brilliant system it is seen by many as a hindrance and encumbrance.**

Mike: I'm just back from Caithness and there, for instance, they are working in alliance in all sorts of ways presbyterially and that has enormous benefits. I am seeing churches all up and down the country, settled churches with buildings and premises spectacularly rebuilding and remodelling themselves. Wick, Burnside, Chryston, Newton Mearns and Mossbank Baptist churches... models of longterm commitment to their communities. Alongside that I am also seeing what I would call PowerPoint churches. They don't even have Church in their name. They might be called Living Stones, or the

Rock. They don't meet in a recognisable church building, but in hotels, or schools or even pubs. I see both of these models as signs of real hope.

**Ann: So despite the recent census you don't sound too discouraged by the situation in the country.**

Mike: We do need to face up to the story the statistics tell us and I fear a lot of people are not doing that. I fear that there are some just looking after themselves and hoping the corner will be turned. There are many who are desperately discouraged, scattered and unsupported who struggle to know how to go on. I think there are others who have unrealistic expectations as to how the Lord is going to turn the situation on its head.

So my role is about encouraging, bridgebuilding and, please God, it will eventually be about perspective because I think one of the things going on now is that the Lord is shaking the church to its very foundations to expose these foundations and help us re-examine. Surprise, surprise, the era we live in is remarkably like the time of the Acts of the apostles so there's a place to begin to rebuild... a multicultural, pluralistic, competitive culture very similar to the Roman empire. I echo the sentiment that we may not be turning the tide but there are new streams flowing. There are true signs of life in the church.

**Mike is aware that some day, someone, somewhere, is going to ask what he has accomplished in this post, that there is the real pressure of expectation. Given his experience, his gifts, his godly openness to what God may reveal and do I can think of no one more able to develop this role and put EA on the map in Scotland as a major resource serving the evangelical church.**

### Given for You – a fresh look at communion

Eleanor Kreider

IVP, Leicester, 1998. 255pp. £9.99

ISBN 0 85111 5829

This book contains four main sections. In the first section, the largest of the four, the author (a lecturer in worship and liturgy at Regent's Park College, Oxford University) surveys the development of the communion service from the first century down to contemporary renewal movements. She argues that a pendulum-like reaction, between mysticism and sacramentalism, has led to communion no longer retaining the central focus that it once enjoyed. For some, a subjective approach, with its emphasis on personal feelings, has 'reduced communion to a purely emotional experience'. The objective approach, with its emphasis upon the qualifications of the celebrant, the verbal formulas employed and a preoccupation with the 'elements', is said similarly to distort our understanding of the sacrament. At the conclusion of her survey, which seems weighted towards recapturing the 'meal' character of the sacrament, the reader's own approach to the eucharist is challenged.

In the second section we are introduced to the rich range of communion themes, some of which are central to all Christian traditions, while others are clearly associated with particular groups. The author believes that a narrow and limited understanding of these themes including thanksgiving, remembrance, the coming kingdom, reconciliation, peace, justice, the presence of Christ, forgiveness, healing, making covenant, discipleship, service, inclusiveness, mystery, and atonement will greatly impoverish our worship and our daily lives.

This book was published in the USA under the title *Communion Shapes Character* and the third section of the book retains this same heading and reveals the author's goal: 'This book is about community character building, not as an aim in itself but as a by-product of true worship. Worship does not need to get stuck in a sanctuary,

### Book Reviews

throughout the week its energy can be set free to transform and shape our everyday lives.' A number of practical issues surrounding communion are examined including ritual language, how and to whom the invitation to participate in the Lord's supper is given, fellowship meals, communion hymnology, the visual environment and prayer. The author hopes that such scrutiny will enable the reader to recognise that the manner in which communion is celebrated will shape our understanding of the church, its ministers and the nature of Christ's presence in the communion service. Thus 'What is strong will be stronger from being examined. What is less important may be altered to create better coherence or communication.'

In the final section the author asks the question, 'What comes from communion?' Her threefold answer is disappointingly brief. First, it contributes to the development of Christian character – the most distinctive aspect of which is said to be commonality! Secondly, it should be a means of deepening the unity of the people of God – the difficulties experienced by Christians from different traditions participating together forms the locus of this discussion – 'they are not justified in keeping separate tables.' Finally, a richer understanding of the Lord's supper is viewed as a challenge to the church's mission, while the sacrament itself is viewed as a mode of evangelism. Wesley's words, 'the converting power of the eucharist', are quoted in support of this view. The way in which Alpha courses have pursued informality, and emphasised a shared meal, is developed and positively welcomed.

Although many readers may not agree with many of the details of this book and some of its conclusions, it does serve to challenge our thinking and evaluate our own understanding of communion.

Harry Mealyea, Ayr

## Book reviews

### Gender and the New Testament

Richard Briggs

Grove Books Ltd, Cambridge, 2001.

24pp. £2.50

ISBN 1 85174 4762

Richard Briggs teaches New Testament and Hermeneutics at All Nations College and in this booklet in the Grove Biblical Series he deals with the question of how the Bible speaks to the controversial and complex gender issue. This debatable subject involves more than just an argument over whether or not women are permitted to preach in Church.

He is convinced that a renewed reflection on the biblical text ought to set the agenda for Christians rather than the 'modern women's movement'. However, he argues that it is no longer possible to state simple principles because the issue requires an approach characterised by a level of hermeneutical sophistication. Accordingly he propounds six 'hermeneutical theses'.

While running the risk of oversimplification, but in order to give something of the flavour of his points they may be stated as follows: The New Testament writers do not provide a coherent account of the topic. Labels such as 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' are unhelpful. The issue cannot be settled solely on exegesis. Care must be taken when assuming the cultural milieu of the first century. Labelling a passage as 'contextual' does not necessarily carry any significant hermeneutical implications. The New Testament should be read theologically-Christologically-ethically.

The author is correct when he acknowledges that this is not the last word on the subject but, as he suggests, his guidelines might help to clarify the issue or at least provoke continuing reflection and discussion. In debating these guidelines he appeals for those who disagree not to break fellowship with each other. As a contribution to the ongoing debate this booklet

deserves careful consideration by those seeking to understand and expound Scripture and especially those concerned with the issue of the role of women in the Church.

*John W Lockington, Larne*

### Philippians and Galatians - Interpretation Bible Studies

Stanley P. Saunders

Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky,

2001. 103 pp. £5.99

ISBN 0 6645 0102 8

This is one of a number of Bible study guides in the Interpretation Bible Studies series. They can be used for either personal use or for group study and are written for adults and older teenagers. Each volume in the series covers ten key passages from the Bible and in this case we have four from Philippians and six from Galatians. At a little over one hundred pages long, this is not a detailed commentary. Nevertheless, Saunders manages to pack a great deal of information into each chapter.

Occasional maps, illustrations, short extracts from commentaries, and suggestions for further readings help to break up the text and provide further understanding of the Bible passage. At the end of each chapter several questions are provided to help the reader reflect on the passage and think about its contemporary message. We can imagine members of a Bible study group reading the chapters at home and discussing the questions when they meet together.

A bibliography is provided which lists commentaries and books relating to Philippians and Galatians. Most of these are from American publishers. A Leader's Guide is also supplied at the end of the book.

Saunders has done well to draw out the cultural background to Paul's letters, to explain the meaning of the selected texts, and to draw out their significance for today's readers. There is a North American bias that some readers may find annoying. For some comments, we would like to see a clearer explanation given (for instance, on p. 66 his use of 'through the faith/faith-

fulness of Jesus Christ' in Galatians 2:16a). And some of his statements are irresponsible (for instance, see his comments on justification on p. 67). This is a pity since there is much here that is stimulating and helpful.

*Colin Gamble, Naas, County Kildare*

### Preaching with the Grain of Scripture

Stephen Wright

Grove Books Ltd., Cambridge, 24pp.

£2.50

ISBN 1 85174 4681

In his book Stephen Wright argues persuasively for allowing the Bible itself to direct the preacher in his presentation of the gospel. Using the metaphor of 'going with the grain' he highlights the challenge facing us in being faithful to the gospel without simply treating the Bible as a quarry for texts. Instead, the author emphasises the need to 'engage' with the text. Wright is also concerned that, while availing himself of the healthy corrective of traditional interpretation, the preacher should recognise Scripture as a living word and allow it to speak relevantly to our life and times. To this end he is insistent that we must be on guard against the error of isolating the content of biblical passage from its essential form in the text, a practice that can lead to misinterpretation and misapplication.

The writer goes on to alert us to preaching patterns which might hinder us in 'going with the grain' of Scripture. He highlights the pressure that can come from following a Lectionary, or a theme, either of which can, by their restriction on the content of Scripture we are examining, tempt us to force the Bible into a mould rather than allow it to lead our thought. Wright also warns us against the pressure of a structure, whereby the requirement to fit the Bible message into a standard template may do justice to neither the content nor the form of the passage in question.

The author then proceeds to provide helpful examples from some of his own sermons of just exactly what he means by 'going with the grain'. He



then sums up in his conclusion how this method has the dual benefit of treating Scripture with integrity while also retaining the interest of the congregation. This worthwhile publication is readily available from Grove Books Ltd., and will commend itself for use within the congregational situation.

*Clifford Rennie, Larbert*

### **Matthew For Everyone – Volumes I and 2**

Tom Wright

SPCK, London, 2002. 223 pp. (Volume 1); 227 pp. (Volume 2); £8.99 each volume.

ISBN 0 281 05301 4 (Vol 1); 0 281 05487 8 (Vol 2)

### **Matthew: The People's Bible Commentary**

John Proctor

BRE, Oxford, 2001. 245pp. £7.99

ISBN 1 84101 191 6

These books are part of series that are primarily for daily, or at least regular devotional reading. Whereas the *People's Bible Commentary* has a range of contributors, Tom Wright is himself undertaking the mammoth task of a series covering the whole of the New Testament. And he is providing his own fresh translation of the text as he goes!

His two-volume work on Matthew (chapters 1-15 and then 16-28) is similar in format to the famous series by Professor William Barclay. The blurb on the cover claims that the series is also suitable for group use, but there is nothing that sets it out especially for that purpose, e.g. no questions for discussion.

Its main use will be as a daily reading guide. And what a good guide it is. Tom Wright has a lively style, offers plenty of illustrations from contemporary life, helpfully outlines the main thrust of each section and makes relevant and searching applications. He gives enough background information without going into tangential detail, and there is a helpful glossary. Throughout, the stress is clearly on 'this is what it says, this is what it means, and here is how we ought to respond to it'. That he manages to do this without

being overly repetitive and stilted is a triumph of creative and imaginative skill. Very highly recommended.

John Proctor's shorter work consists of a short introduction to Matthew which considers matters such as the outline of the book, Matthew and Judaism, on Christian living, recommended reading etc., and then 112 daily reading sections. Each of these 112 is given two pages in which Proctor outlines the main points and again comes up with helpful applications. There is a short comment for reflection and/or a short prayer at the end of each section. It has slightly more of verse by verse or at least paragraph by paragraph outline than Tom Wright's, more reference to what particular words or phrases might mean, and so less space for the pulling it together in as thrustful way as Wright manages. However it does not get bogged down in detail, and is not overly technical. Again the author is to be thanked and congratulated on a particularly fine commentary. I hope it can be widely used.

*Gordon R Palmer, East Kilbride*

### **Revelation – The apocalypse of St John – Lion Classic series**

(No author or editor given)

Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1997. 96pp. £2.99

ISBN 0 7459 3798 5

This is an unusual book for several reasons, primarily because it does not say who the author or editor is. It stands alone as a volume in a series that deals with other biblical texts. Such an approach to publishing is one that I have never come across before, so it raises questions to which I have no answers. For example, does the publisher think that the material is to make its own claim to truth, or what? All writings, even collections, are stamped by the convictions of the author/editor. Knowing the identity of the author/editor is a key introduction to the work, and thus a vital piece of information on the cover of any book.

The authors are not even listed in the contents page as would normally

## **Book reviews**

be done. I cannot understand why such an important piece of information is denied to the prospective purchaser. A brief introduction by Richard Harries (the Bishop of Oxford, I assume) is the nearest we get to a clue about its theology. Also, the book does have a brief (seven-page) traditional type of introduction to the book of Revelation itself; this has been provided by John Drane. It concludes with the entire text of Revelation as the final chapter.

The book is also unusual in the way that it is constructed. It selects themes from the book of Revelation and makes some brief comments on the text that contains the theme. After doing this it draws together writings from the secular field that use the imagery of the particular theme under discussion. These samples from secular literature generally have no regard for the message of John, but merely use his imagery as literary devices. Thus the text is made to say things that are quite different from their original significance in the book of Revelation itself.

It is at this level of the individual theme that we have some insight as to who the contributors are. At the end of each theme, which occupies anything from one to six pages, the author of that short section is given. The distinct impression is that these people are not theologians but lecturers in humanities from different universities around the world. The main aim of these writers seems to be to show how Revelation has influenced world literature.

For this reviewer the book is an enigma. It is not biblical study. It has very little that is relevant to preaching, at least biblical preaching. Its place is probably in the English department as an example of the vague influence of Revelation on world literature. I honestly could not recommend it as a contribution to understanding the message of Revelation.

*Tom Holland, Wales*



## Book reviews

### Reconstructing Nature – The Engagement of Science and Religion

John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor.

T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998. 367pp.  
ISBN 0 567 08600 3 £25.00

This book is an important and interesting historical analysis of 'the engagement of science and religion'. It is a revised and extended version of the 1995-96 Gifford lectures given by the authors who are both historians of science.

In its pages we meet many of the great characters and themes that have influenced the engagement over the past four hundred years. References to the ancient Greeks are also made. The authors are not supporting any particular theological or anti-theological position, although they give the impression of being more sympathetic to theism than to atheism, and have little time for the dogmatism of contemporary militant atheist scientists such as Peter Atkins.

Also they have no 'meta-narrative' with which to interpret the history of science's engagement with religion. On the contrary it is their declared aim to show that no such 'meta-narrative' is possible. For example, although they only refer to Ian Barbour a few times, they are critical of his well-known four models of the relationship, namely:

- Conflict (Galileo, Darwin, Dawkins, Young Earth Creationism etc.)
- Independence (Both address genuine issues but there is no overlap between them)
- Dialogue (Science raises questions that it cannot answer – questions that religions usually address).
- Integration (There is enough overlap between science and religion's quest for truth that a genuine search for truth in one can illuminate the other.)

Our authors regard all such categorisation as simplistic, and they show from the 'colourful characters and the very variable historical contexts – the-

ological, personal, academic and political – how the issues are too complex to be fitted into Barbour's scheme. This reviewer too has criticised elsewhere the way Barbour has used his classification to categorise contemporary attitudes. Nevertheless this reviewer believes that, even granted that history and present-day life are far too complex to allow an easy categorisation of attitudes, Barbour's categories can be helpful for someone beginning to study the subject – as long as he/she is made aware that they must be treated with considerable caution.

After an interesting Introduction the book is divided into four sections: 'Science and Religion'; 'Reconstructing History'; 'Having Designs on Nature'; and 'Structuring Experience'. In these sections we have a total of ten chapters. Among these are:

- A very useful first chapter showing how important history is in understanding present-day attitudes which, unfortunately, are influenced by complete misunderstandings of the content and results of old disputes, such as the famous public clash between Thomas Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce.
- A strong critique of NewAge science – especially Capra's *The Tao of Physics*.
- A myth-destroying and amusing account of Galileo's clash with the Roman Catholic Church
- Three very helpful chapters on the successes, failures and the revival of the Design argument – the actual argument, the rhetoric used, and Romanticism's use of the 'beauty' of the natural world.
- Fascinating biographical narratives clearly demonstrating the difficulty of Barbour-type taxonomy.
- Quakers and Science.
- Chemistry and religion.

In the ever-growing Science-Religion arena this is an important book because so often present-day arguments are made in a vacuum. It is surprising to read both religious and anti-religious scientists who think they are the first to think of an argument

and seem to be unaware of the personalities and discussions that have had their place in the discussions for centuries if not millennia. With the advance of science the details of the argument may change but the content rarely does. A good knowledge of basic philosophy, theology and history would help the debate considerably. This book makes its valuable historical contribution to provide the perspective that is necessary for the study of this subject.

The book is well written with many quotable quotes, a good set of illustrations and good indices of persons and subjects.

Howard Taylor, Heriot-Watt University,  
Edinburgh

### The Lamb Wins! A guided tour through the Book of Revelation

Richard Bewes

Christian Focus Publications, Tain,  
2000. 156pp.

ISBN 1 85792 597 1

This accessible, non-technical, holistic overview of Revelation was written as sermons for the congregation at All Souls, Langham Place, and first published by Mowbray in 1984 entitled *The Church Overcomes* and now republished by Christian Focus. It covers the whole of Revelation in 18 readable sermons, organised under 6 section headings – Christ is with His Church (Rev. 1-3), God is on the Throne (Rev. 4-7), The Trumpets are Sounding (Rev. 8-11), The Victory of the Lamb (Rev. 12-14), The Overthrow of Evil (Rev. 15-19) and The New Order (Rev. 20-22). Each section consists of three, clearly outlined and well-illustrated sermons with Study Suggestions and Questions at the end. In terms of theology the author approaches Revelation from a Reformed 'parallelism' position, reminiscent of Prof. Tom Torrance in *The Apocalypse Today*, to whom he refers. By 'parallelism' the author sees Revelation as presenting 'one picture. With each new section a fresh facet, a new colour, is added until in the end I've got the complete picture.' (p. 17). However, the

author seeks to be inclusive of other views when appropriate and avoids theological controversy. For example, having explained various positions in chapter one, he only admits to being a 'parallelist' in chapter 16 when dealing with the difficulties of Rev. 20. I found his approach refreshing but would have liked the addition of a reference section and a bibliography to scan for sources. For the preacher, this book is a good example of how to preach through Revelation in a relevant, non-controversial, Christ-centred way, without falling into some of the possible theological bogs. For us all, it is a good alternative to the many pre-millennialist books that have been published in recent years. I warmly commend it.

*Sam Torrens, Fortrose*

### 1 Corinthians: Holiness and Hope of a Rescued People – Focus on the Bible Series

Paul Barnett

Christian Focus Publications, Tain, 2000. 320pp.

ISBN 1 85792 598 X

The Focus on the Bible Series, both Old and New Testament, has proved of enormous value, both to the preacher and to the individual studying God's Word. The three cornerstones of readable, reliable and relevant make these commentaries accessible, without losing anything of a scholar's attention to detail. It is clear that what reaches the printed page is the product of extensive and careful scholarship and the fact that much of that detail is either footnoted or left out does nothing to detract. Indeed, it does much to keep the reader's mind focused on the purpose of the book under study and the sweeping themes that characterise its message. The series is also firmly rooted in the relevance of contemporary application and is rich in pastoral content. For the preacher in particular, this is of enormous value in moving from text to sermon.

Paul Barnett's commentary on 1 Corinthians is excellent and I would recommend it unreservedly. As both a preacher and scholar, Barnett gives us

exactly what makes this series what it is, a commentary that is readable, reliable and relevant. The Apostle's purpose in writing this letter was pastoral, his concern the up-building of the church in Corinth and elsewhere. The heartbeat of this commentary is a lucid and perceptive reflection of that purpose into our contemporary context. Barnett's starting point is to take Paul's arrangement of the letter as a series of sermons – 'True Wisdom' (1-4), 'Sexual Holiness' (5-7), 'Temple Attendance' (8-10), 'Behaviour at Church Meetings' (11-14) and 'Resurrection Hope' (15). Within this overall structure, the commentary offers what is basically a chapter by chapter exposition. That said, the text never loses its rooting in these larger themes and in the overall pastoral theme of up-building the church. For example, Barnett's treatment of chapter 13 is entitled 'The Way of Love'. Here, his exposition of Christian love, that which emanates from the Christian because they are 'in Christ' and the Spirit lives in their heart, never loses its contextual purpose. Love in the most excellent way of Christian living and in the context of Church building is the character that fosters unity, fellowship and growth. To use the sub-title of the commentary, it is the heart of 'holiness and hope of a rescued people'.

Perhaps my best recommendation would simply be to repeat David Jackman's comment on the cover of the book. His reflections are worth far more than mine. This commentary 'makes Paul's great letter come alive with sparkling insights and pressing relevance'.

*Robin Sydseff, Edinburgh*

### Prayer

Richard Foster

Hodder & Stoughton, 1992. 297pp. £7.99

ISBN 0343056900X

After a time of self-imposed exile from public ministry, Richard Foster felt the call of God to write on the difficult subject of prayer. His book is a very personal account of his highs, lows,

## Book reviews

struggles and triumphs in the realm of prayer.

For Foster the whole idea of prayer is an invitation to come home to where we belong, with our Father. He is on a spiritual journey to find this true home and at the very beginning of the book Foster invites the reader to go on this journey of prayer with him.

The book is divided into three sections.

- Part one is moving inwards, seeking the transformation we need. He examines the inner self, the need to forgive, the healing power of tears and relinquishment of problems. This along with the understanding of who we come to in prayer makes the section a powerful beginning, and one may be tempted to say this is too close to home and too difficult, I will read another book; this would be a mistake.
- Part two is moving upwards, seeking the intimacy we need from God. Here Foster touches on the idea of adoration, confession, rest and peace as well as the lost art of sacramental and meditative prayer.
- Part three is moving outward, into the ministry we need and our church needs. This for Foster is the power of prayer working in the body of Christ such as healing prayer, intercessory prayer, petitionary prayer and for Foster the most important, the prayer of suffering.

There is no doubt that this is an impressive book full of quotes and moving illustrations from such people as St Benedict with his twelve step programme, to DL Moody and CS Lewis; this is the strength of the book along with its constant Biblical references. It is an interesting read and will challenge the reader to a wider understanding of prayer.

*Mark Brown, Granshaw, NI*

## Book reviews

### Turning Points. Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity

Mark A. Noll

IVP, Leicester, & Baker House, Grand Rapids, 1997. 335pp. £11.99  
ISBN 0 85111 191 2

Most readers of this Journal will need no persuading that the study of Christian history is one of the most profitable, practical and exciting activities in which we can engage. Where such persuasion is required, Noll's reflections in the introduction to this work might just do the trick. Those of us who are pastors would love to see more of our people reading church history and thus reaping the real benefits such engagement can bring. In the case of some at least, maybe a little encouragement is all that is needed and this overview of Christian history by a distinguished American evangelical historian provides an accessible introduction to which we can point them. Written 'for lay-people and introductory students', seasoned readers will also find profit in it.

Noll adopts the unusual method of organising his survey around a series of twelve 'turning points' in church history, beginning with the fall of Jerusalem (70) and concluding with the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910). Potential turning points for the twentieth century are discussed in the final chapter. Noll recognises that this approach involves a considerable element of subjective judgement in deciding what constitutes such critical moments. Other choices could have been made. Noll argues, however, for the advantages of this approach in that it 'combine(s) more focus than a survey usually allows, while still attending to large-scale movements of institutions, people, and doctrines in the history of the church'. In order to work, this approach requires much skill in setting the chosen turning points in their broad context. In this reviewer's judgement, Noll has succeeded well in his undertaking.

This work is easily read and its interest and usefulness are increased by the use of many maps, charts and illustrations. Further reading is suggested at the end of each chapter. The inclusion of questions for discussion would have increased the work's value for group study. Altogether an admirable introduction to the history of Christianity which should be in every church library.

*Angus Morrison, Stornoway*

### Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch

Duane Garrett

Christian Focus Publications, Tain, 2000. 320pp. £10.99  
ISBN 1 85792 576 9

Originally published in 1991, Garrett's study remains the most persuasive and accessible conservative alternative to the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), although some may prefer T. Desmond Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (second edition, pp. 3-94). Garrett systematically exposes the inadequacies of DH and, more importantly, constructs a highly plausible theory regarding the sources used by Moses in composing Genesis that is based on an understanding of ancient literary genres, techniques and processes in comparison with Genesis.

Garrett identifies two basic types of pre-Mosaic sources: genealogical and narrative. Based on the occurrences of the term *toledoth* Garrett discerns nine genealogical sources used by Moses to structure the book. The basic content of Genesis, however, is narrative. According to Garrett, these narrative stories originated with the patriarchs as oral accounts and were later written down in various literary genres common in the ancient Near East, such as 'ancestor epics' (e.g., epics of Jacob, Lot, Hagar), 'negotiation tales' (Gen. 23, 24, 34), a 'gospel' (Gospel of Abraham in Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22), and a 'migration epic' (epic of Jacob in Gen. 37-50). However, having identified these texts with pre-Mosaic sources, Garrett reveals that one significant text

has no pre-Mosaic source. He concludes that Genesis 1:1-2:3 was directly revealed by God to Moses as an introduction to the whole book.

Garrett claims the pre-Mosaic genealogical and narrative sources were preserved and transmitted by Levites, who functioned as scribes and teachers for the community prior to the exodus. This is an attractive suggestion, despite the absence of direct evidence. It is not essential, though, that Garrett identify the specific tradents; it is enough that this kind of scribal activity did occur at that time and in that setting.

Against the Documentary Hypothesis, which claims Moses did not write Genesis, Garrett convincingly argues that Moses was inspired by God to compose the book, adapting the genealogical and narrative sources as necessary (cf. Lk 1:3) and receiving direct revelation for the introduction (1:1-2:3).

*Robert Keay, St Andrews*

### Mission in a Conspiracy Culture

Pedr Beckley

Grove Books Limited, Cambridge, 2002. 28pp. £2.50  
ISBN 1 85174 5157

This *Grove Evangelism Series* booklet examines the growth of suspicion in our culture and asks how the gospel can be spoken into that context. Thought provoking analysis traces the development of a paranoia that has led to an increasing focus on self and resulted in suspicion of authoritative spokespersons. Helpful insights into the dangers of Christian conspiracy thinking are also addressed.

Conclusions for mission fall into two very different categories: general conclusions that have been rehearsed in a number of other places and some very specific to those working with groups who have bought heavily into conspiracy theories.

Perhaps the material could be used as a discussion starter amongst Christian leaders.

*Andy Bathgate, SU, Scotland*

## How Hymns Shape Our Lives

Rosalind Brown

Grove Books, Cambridge, 2001. 24pp. £2.50

ISSN 0262 799 X

The advertising slogan for a well-known Games Console told us never to underestimate its power. The author of this Grove Booklet wishes to impress upon us the same idea when it comes to hymns and songs in Christian worship. Her emphasis on their formative power is the heartbeat of this text; they shape the lives of people who sing them as faith is taught, trust is built, hope is brought and action is moulded.

The chapter headings give a flavour of what you will find within its pages: 'Teaching and Formation', 'Identity, Memory, Hope and Action', 'What are we singing today?', 'Hymns and Christian Formation'. These are preceded by a short introduction that concludes with a question relevant to many readers of RJCM: 'How can those who choose what is sung in church do so wisely, aware of what the effect might be?'. The warning from Brown comes in chapter 4; either pay careful attention to the formative power of the words chosen, or the Christian formation of a congregation through hymnody will be a hit and miss affair.

*How Hymns Shape Our Lives* covers many of the issues currently under the spotlight in the debate as to what is sung in public worship. Language, tunes, emotions, the theological illiteracy of a TV generation, and the 'I' texts of personal response are just some of these familiar themes. Statistical information is well used in strengthening Brown's thesis, as well as extensive interaction with the words of various hymns and songs. There is a case study into two hymns, *Be still for the presence of the Lord*, *the Holy One, is here* and *Praise, my soul, the King of heaven*, explaining what she believes to be their popularity and formative power. A section on hymns and the formation of children and young people worryingly concludes that their faith will rest on different foundations to those of earlier generations.

Ignore the formative power of hymns at your peril, enter into it for your good; this Grove Booklet certainly stimulates the reader to pursue the latter. Helpful, insightful, and like all good hymns, one's horizons broadened.

Stephen Lockington, Mullingar

## P.S God, Can you fly?

R. Wayne Williams

Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2002. 119pp. £6.99

ISBN 0 664 22568 3

As both a great admirer of congregational resources from the United States and someone who is very sceptical of collections of children's prayers, I approached this book with some trepidation. Admiration prevailed!

Williams, a hospital chaplain and Director of Pastoral Care in a paediatric healthcare facility, has taken some of the prayers written by children, both in hospital and for loved ones in hospital, and has used them as a base for theological and pastoral reflection.

Through a series of reflections he opens up the children's prayers and highlights the fact that we have much to learn from the openness of their prayers. Using the words of the prayers he skilfully adds personal reflections as well as biblical quotations to turn each into a short meditation that provokes the reader to further thought.

With his obvious everyday connection to children he is able to offer a 'childlike' insight into faith and God's presence in times of illness. Through this there is a drive towards encouraging us all to rediscover the basic and much needed elements of our relationship with God.

Through the prayers he covers such diverse topics as guilt, trust, and our responsibility to children. Using an extensive range of quotations he brings in many secular writers, theologians and world figures to add a fascinating mix of reflection and inspiration.

This book is ideal for anyone involved in pastoral care, but also as a tool for reflection and personal search.

I found this book a marvellous read

## Book Reviews

and I am sure I will return to it and find more in each prayer every time.

Doug Swanney, Edinburgh

## 30 Years that changed the world – a fresh look at the book of Acts

Michael Green

IVP, Leicester, 2000. 288pp. £9.99

ISBN 0 85111 261 7

This title is about how the disciples of Jesus changed the Mediterranean world in just thirty years. This may seem a short period but it really took about a generation to work out who the Good News was for! The pivotal point was the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) which met to sort out what matters were essential and inessential. That year (48 A.D.) was eighteen years since the unscrambling of tongues at Pentecost in Jerusalem and fourteen since Peter received his visual aid from the Lord. In other words, it took a generation for a multilingual church to become multicultural. This book shows how that was accomplished and begins with a positive view of the early church by communicating across cultures.

On one hand the early church enjoyed the advantage of the Roman Empire (political stability, good communications), Greek culture (language, thought forms, mystery cults) and the Jewish faith (monotheism, translation of OT., temple worship). On other hand, they had to face up to opposition from the Jews (spiritual authority, the Messiah, and the church) as well as the Gentiles (criticisms over religion, anti-social life, anti-intellectualism). Nevertheless, the approach of the early disciples provides tools to use in our post-modern world. Michael Green argues in this volume that the first-century world-view is very relevant for our outlook in the early twenty first century. Consider, for example, the challenge of cities and apologetics.

Within the next twenty years it is estimated that 60% of the world's pop-

## Book Reviews

ulation will live in urban areas. We are also living through the greatest human migration in history. How should a declining church in the secular western world respond? "The early Christians went for tough city centres, and they lived and planted churches there." (p.38) They lived in an urban and multi-faith context and met with rejection. The message is not to abandon the city but 'to maintain the outward orientation that Christ laid upon his followers.'

I find his exposition of the apologetics of the early church to be the best feature in the book. 'If we do not understand and relate to the culture of our times, we will not gain a hearing. If we do not challenge the culture of our day, we will not bring anyone to faith. Instead, we will have compromised the gospel beyond recognition.' (p. 109) Through asking questions about personal significance (identity, worth and purpose), we are likely to achieve more than by articulating arguments on religion and morality. All who want to communicate the Gospel as 'Good News' should read chapter seven.

Elsewhere we are given a challenging but balanced position on the subject of spiritual gifts (p.259), but there is a strange absence of footnotes and the book would be much more useful if it had an index. There is a theory concerning chapter 28 of the book of Acts that Luke abruptly finished it because he intended to write a third volume on the mission of the church (with his life of Jesus as part one). Alas, Luke did not produce a trilogy, but Michael Green challenges us to learn from the early church and write chapter 29 in our own century.

*Robert Calvert, Rotterdam*

Chris Wright strikes many surprising sparks of relevance between Deuteronomy and contemporary western society. Deuteronomy, usually seen as dry, legalistic and of no consequence, is brought to life. In 124 pages he has provided as easy-to-read introduction to key themes in the first ten chapters of Deuteronomy. He is aware of the recent upsurge of interest in the 10 commandments— about how we live. In this book he takes Deuteronomy 1-10 – about who we live for. This is conveyed in the chapter titles – Knowing God, Loving God, Confronting God and Imitating God. The book is informative, providing both background theological explanation and then the application to Christian living. He writes in a conversational, light tone that masks the depth of his knowledge revealed in his commentary on Deuteronomy in the NIBC series.

Wright emphasises the recurring theme of mission in Deuteronomy. Other sections describe the strength of personal faith as seen in the character of Moses, and how God's Old Testament principles apply to contemporary issues of affluence, materialistic idolatry, morality, pluralism and judgement. He expands on the topics of redemption, revelation and relevance. The teaching about only one God transfers to the unique Jesus. He makes political point or two about Israel then and now, and how God had no favourites who would be excused, including Israel, and how warnings from God to Israel about their foreign policy has crossover today.

This little inexpensive paperback, which is a condensed version of the Bible reading addresses given at a UK Spring Harvest event in 1997, definitely achieves its purpose of being accessible, brief and relevant.

---

**r father n hvn**

Simon Jenkins  
Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.  
144pp. £6.99  
ISBN 0 664 22598 5  
This little book, which will fit nicely in

your anorak pocket, holds an impressive collection of Bible verses as 'text messages' or 'txt msgs'. It's the product of a competition held on [www.ship-of-fools.com](http://www.ship-of-fools.com) with further texts supplied by Simon Jenkins (also editor of [fish.co.uk](http://fish.co.uk) – the ISP run by Christian Aid). The three sections are, in plain language: 1) the Basics – including useful dictionaries of short-forms and symbols, 'Around the Bible in 58 texts', 'the Dead Sea Texts', 'Text blessings', 'Emergency Calls' 2) Old Testament – including the creation story, the Ten Commandments, many sections of psalms, Ecclesiastes ch. 3 and 3) New Testament – including the Beatitudes, The 'I am' sayings, extracts from 1 Corinthians ch. 13 and much more.

Who will understand it? Clearly every teenager whose fingers fly over his/her mobile phone producing text messages faster than you can read them. Amazingly, 'text messaging' is taught now in schools as part of the English language curriculum, to children as young as eight. Also, three ladies in their 70s were given samples by this reviewer, and had not the slightest difficulty translating them.

What's the point? It's fun. It's accessible to many young people who have never opened a Bible. It's useful if you want to send an uplifting verse to one of your friends over the phone. It's thoroughly up-to-date. It will doubtless inspire young people and others to try their hand at converting more of Scripture into 'txt'.

Who should buy it? It would make a great gift for any young person, Christian or non-Christian. It would also make a great resource for anyone who works with young people and is looking for new ways of making a connection. As someone who needs all the help she can get running an SU group and a Bible class, I'm v.gr8tful 4 it.

*Karen Palmer, East Kilbride*

---

### Ambassadors to the World – Declaring God's love

Chris Wright  
IVP, Leicester, 1998. 124pp. £4.99  
ISBN 0 85110 895 4